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THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Rev. John T. Dean, M.A.

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AND

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THE BOOK OF REVELATION

BY REV. JOHN T. DEAN, M.A.

'THEN I saw in my dream that the Interpreter took Christian by the hand, and led him into a place where was a fire burning against a wall, and one standing by it always casting much water upon it to quench it; yet did the fire burn higher and hotter.

'Then said Christian, "What means this?"

'The Interpreter answered, "This fire is the work of grace that is wrought in the heart; he that casts water upon it to extinguish and put it out, is the devil: but in that thou seest the fire notwithstanding burn higher and hotter, thou shalt also see the reason of that." So he had him about to the backside of the wall, where he saw a man with a vessel of oil in his hand, of the which he did also continually cast, but secretly, into the fire.

'Then said Christian, "What means this?"

'The Interpreter answered, "This is Christ, who continually with the oil of His grace maintains the work already begun in the heart: by the means of which, notwithstanding what the devil can do, the souls of His people prove gracious still. And in that thou sawest that the man stood behind the wall to maintain the fire; this is to teach thee, that it is hard for the tempted to see how the work of grace is maintained in the soul."'

The Pilgrim's Progress.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

BY

REV. J. T. DEAN, M.A.

AUTHOR OF 'VISIONS AND REVELATIONS'

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PREFACE

Two lines of study have in recent years contributed to the elucidation of the Book of Revelation.

In his editions of Jewish Apocalypses, Prof. Charles has not only furnished the key to its imagery, but has also shown the genesis of the system of religious thought to which its author, in common with the other N.T. writers, fell heir.

Still more important for the understanding of the Book are the investigations of Prof. Ramsay and others into the social and religious life of the Asiatic provinces of the Roman Empire in the first century of the Christian era.

The fruits of these studies are seen in a number of recent commentaries, of which those of Prof. Anderson Scott, Prof. Swete and Prof. Moffatt may be named. To the last of these the numerous references in this work show in a small degree my special indebtedness.

But the unique contribution to the interpretation of the Book is always made through the reproduction in History of the conditions that gave it birth; and few ages in the history of the world have had such an opportunity of entering into the mind of the seer of Patmos and of experiencing the spiritual uplift of his vision as the present, which has become, in all essential features, 'partaker with him in the tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience that are in Jesus.'

I would take this opportunity of thanking my friends, the Rev. John Maclaren, M.A., of Ayton, and the Rev. John Morrison, B.D., of Edenkillie, who read the MS., and made many valuable suggestions.

J. T. D.

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'Love is and was my King and Lord
And will be, tho' as yet I keep
Within his court on earth, and sleep
Encompass'd by his faithful guard.

And hear at times a sentinel
Who moves about from place to place,
And whispers to the worlds of space,
In the deep night, that all is well.'

TENNYSON, *In Memoriam.*

THE BOOK OF REVELATION.

INTRODUCTION.

I. THE SITUATION OF THE CHURCH AT THE TIME WHEN THE APOCALYPSE WAS WRITTEN.

The Apocalypse can be understood only in the light of the relation in which the Empire stood to the Church at the close of the first century, and especially in the light of an institution, half religious and half political, conformity to which was regarded by the one as the mark of a loyal citizen, and by the other as apostasy from Christ. Of this institution it will be necessary to give some account.

Admiration of the Empire and the emperors on the part of the provinces was not without justification. Under the Republic the government of the provinces had been wretched and oppressive in the extreme. The picture of their condition drawn by historians is a dark one. The governor of a province, as possessing the most power with the least responsibility, was able to inflict the greatest amount of misery. 'It was well understood that a man did not expatriate himself from the pleasures of Rome for nothing; to get a province was the recognised means of setting a bankrupt on his legs again.'[1]

But the reforms of Augustus introduced a salutary restraint upon the cupidity and oppression of provincial governors. There

[1] Arnold's *Roman Provincial Administration*, p. 73.

was a power strong enough to punish mal-administration, and there was a machinery for bringing an oppressive governor to book. The result was that 'even under a Tiberius, a Nero, or a Domitian, the provinces enjoyed a freedom from oppression which they seldom enjoyed under the Republic. Just and upright governors were the rule and not the exception, and even an Otho and a Vitellius, tainted with every private vice, returned from their provincial governments with a reputation for integrity.'[1]

To this general condition of things, both on its darker and its brighter side, the province of Asia was no exception. Under the Republic its wealth made it one of the most desired prizes, while the peaceable character of its inhabitants made it an easy prey. The unhappy provincials groaned under an intolerable yoke. Under Augustus, however, though on account of its peacefulness it was placed in the class of Senatorial provinces, whose governors were appointed by and were directly answerable to the Senate, it shared in the good government of the whole Empire, of which the strong and vigilant central administration was the best guarantee.

Further, individual emperors had shown signal marks of favour to the provinces, especially in times of need. Many of the cities of Asia, *e.g.*, had from time to time been devastated by earthquakes ; and emperors like Tiberius had not only remitted the taxes for the time being, but had granted lavish sums to help in their rebuilding. The provincials had therefore solid grounds for enthusiasm for the Empire, and even such of them as were Christians could not fail to cherish a feeling of gratitude for these benefits.

Nor was the way in which the provinces manifested that enthusiasm one that would seem strange to the sentiment of the time. Even before the Empire there had grown up a tendency to attribute something like divinity to the Eternal City. As early as 195 B.C. an altar in honour of Rome had been erected

[1] Dill, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius*, p. 3.

at Smyrna. The Empire fell heir to this attitude of worship, and the emperor, as the concrete and personal representative of the State, was easily associated with it. The politic Augustus, while refusing to sanction the erection of an altar to himself in Rome, saw in the imperial cultus a useful means of unifying his Empire and of strengthening his hold upon the provinces. Accordingly, as early as 29 B.C. a temple to Augustus and Rome was erected at Pergamum. In 23 A.D. the Senate decreed a temple in Asia to the genius of Tiberius; and out of eleven cities, Smyrna was chosen as the site, as a reward of her long history of unbroken loyalty to Rome. Within the first century every considerable city was made a *neokoros* or temple-warden (Acts xix. 35) to the imperial religion. Some were thus honoured twice and even thrice. The permission to erect a temple was a mark of esteem and trust from the emperor to the city, and the due celebration of the worship came to be regarded as the expression of loyalty to the emperor on the part of the city.

Many considerations contributed to the eagerness of the Asian cities in the cultivation of the imperial religion. Their rivalry was keen, and an honour bestowed by the emperor on one was eagerly coveted by the others. Further, the leading families of the province found in the priesthood of the cultus the only way to public distinction open to them. When Augustus reorganised the provinces, he erected in each of them a *native council*, 'to bring the wishes of the province to the knowledge of the government or the governor, and generally to serve as an organ of the province.'[1] But the civil functions of this body, at least in Asia, soon became almost extinct, and it gave itself with redoubled vigour to its religious duties—the care of the imperial worship and of the annual festival in honour of the reigning emperor. The high priest of this worship, the Asiarch, was, apart from the Romans, the most eminent personage in the province, and throughout its bounds the year was designated by his name.

[1] Mommsen.

Though it entailed enormous cost, the office was eagerly sought by the wealthy ; and it was counted worthy of being sculptured on a tombstone that the dead had not only been an Asiarch, but was sprung from Asiarchs.

The people, too, would not be slow in supporting an institution which provided them with annual games after the Olympic model ; and especially, with the object-lesson of Cyzicus before their eyes, which had been deprived of its freedom by Tiberius for this, among other reasons, that it had allowed a decree for building a temple to Augustus to remain unfulfilled.

Thus, eagerness on the part of the cities to receive marks of imperial favour, the desire of wealthy natives to attain the only form of public honour open to them, and the greed of the common people for sports and games, all combined to buttress the worship which the authorities had adopted as an instrument of government.

But this was a way of expressing gratitude and admiration which the followers of Jesus could not take. The claim that was made on behalf of the emperor was irreconcilable with the sole right of Christ to the worship of men. Gradually it would come to the knowledge of the citizens that there was a sect in their midst that refused to join in the emperor-cultus. Astonishment would give place to anger. Every consideration that increased the enthusiasm of the citizens for the worship would make the attitude of the Christians more obnoxious in their eyes. The refusal would be construed into disloyalty ; and both priests and people would take every means in their power to overcome an obstinacy which would not only appear unreasonable and ungracious, but which might have the effect of making the city's loyalty suspect in high quarters. The whole resources of the community would be employed to compel that conformity to the established usage which was not rendered voluntarily.

That the Book of Revelation is the literary monument of a time when the hostility of the Empire to the Church was especially bitter, is evident in every chapter. Throughout its pages we

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catch the echoes of conflict. But one passage in particular, the latter half of the thirteenth chapter, is especially valuable as showing the methods that were employed to crush all opposition to the established worship in the Asiatic cities. We have in it the description of some fête in honour of the emperor. The imperial authorities grace the occasion with their presence. The whole pagan populace has turned out in holiday attire. A clever trickster in the pay of the priests deludes the gaping multitude by pretended miracles, apparently bringing down fire from heaven before their eyes. When the due impression has been made, as one charged with a divine mission, he urges them to add to the objects of the imperial worship by making an image in honour of the emperor. And when the image is heard to utter articulate sounds, probably by some kind of ventriloquism, and these take the form of a command—to all appearance a Divine command—that those who refuse to render adoration be put to death, we can infer with a measure of certainty how the fanatical mob would spend the rest of the day. Nor would the danger pass away with the festival. Decrees were passed, laying on every one, without distinction of class, the obligation of making his sympathy with the popular worship indubitable. No one was allowed to escape through obscurity. At any time some spy of the government might lodge an accusation against him, and he would have to give sure proofs of his loyalty. Round the hated sect was drawn a net of so fine a mesh that none could escape. The native priesthood left no inducement—religious, mental, social, commercial—unused, to break or wear down the constancy of the followers of Jesus, and to compel them to render at the imperial altar the worship that was regarded as the first duty of a loyal citizen.

It was such a crisis as this that called forth the Apocalypse, which makes clear for all time how hard it was to be a Christian in the province of Asia in the closing years of the first century A.D.

II. THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION.

Such was the situation of the Christians to whom the Book was written. In the writer's view, sooner or later, and sooner rather than later, the antagonism between the Church and the Empire must develop into a life and death struggle. And the aim of his message was to brace the Christians to meet the conflict in a way consistent with faithfulness to Christ.

He is able to hold out to them no prospect of escape from the necessity of suffering. They must look for no miraculous intervention of God on their behalf. There are, indeed, passages that give assurance of the safety of the followers of Jesus: but this safety does not consist in deliverance from suffering or even from death. In the belief of the writer the time was at hand when to die in the Lord would be to suffer a violent death (see on xiv. 13). No attempt is made to conceal or disguise the hard truth that the vigilance of the government left no loophole of escape for the followers of Christ. If the writer urges them over and over again to be faithful unto death, this implies the probability of their being called upon to meet death.

And as it was impossible to escape the conflict, so it was futile to offer active resistance. In faithful colours the writer paints the might, the cruelty, the ruthlessness of the Empire, and its implacable hostility to Christ and His followers. The circumstances of the Church, the fewness of its numbers, the smallness of its resources, made it unthinkable that successful resistance could be offered to the Roman Power. It is less correct to say that such a way out of the situation was set aside than that it never arose to the minds of the Christians as a possibility.

Since escape from the conflict and active resistance were thus ruled out, there remained only one way consistent with faithfulness to Christ, to offer an unflinching passive resistance to the demands of the government, and to accept whatever it chose to

inflict, even were it imprisonment or death. This strait and narrow way in which the faithful must travel is not suggested merely ; it is plainly, almost bluntly, expressed in the words, 'If any man is for captivity, into captivity he goeth ; if any man is destined for the sword, with the sword must he be killed' (see on xiii. 10).

It was undoubtedly a hard demand that faithfulness to Christ was making upon His followers. They must deliberately, resolutely, offer defiance to a power that knew no pity, that would show no mercy, that would not hesitate to go all lengths to compass its will. And the writer's aim is to bring to bear upon them the strongest possible appeal, so that they may be strengthened to continue faithful to Christ in the face of the tribulation that they had to endure.

1. The main part of the Book consists of a vision in which, by means of a rich and elaborate symbolism, the writer unfolds the spiritual background of History, and shows the place that the sufferings of the followers of Jesus hold in the carrying out of the Divine plan. In the main the Book of Revelation sets forth in picturesque form and by means of concrete symbol the writer's philosophy of history.

And the fundamental principle of this philosophy is God. Caught up in an ecstasy, the writer sees a throne set, and One sitting upon it, clothed in light and dazzling splendour, and surrounded by celestial beings whose presence serves to express the fulness of the Divine Nature. The majesty, the holiness, the omniscience, the all-pervasive influence of the Creator, are set forth by means of the symbols that appealed most strikingly to the imagination of the time.

But these attributes do not exhaust the writer's conception of the Godhead. They could not be the efficient forces of history. The book of the world's history is seen lying in the hand of Him that sitteth on the throne unopened, till He, whose aspect is that of a Lamb standing as though it had been slain, takes it and looses its seals. In this graphic way the writer asserts that all

hope of the progress of the world towards its divinely-appointed goal is bound up with Him who had been crucified. Even Creative Power could not bring about the triumph of righteousness on the earth, but only the love of God expressed in Jesus. The writer's philosophy of history is thus a Christian Theism. Behind all things is the God and Father of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

As the unrealised course of history was represented by a book closed and sealed, so under the figure of the opening of the seals by Christ, His control over all that happens is asserted. It is by His permission and His summons that the elemental forces of History—War, Famine, Pestilence, etc.—issue forth and take up their places on the stage. His hand evolves the latent and potential into the actual.

We can imagine to some degree the encouragement that would come to the suffering Church from the thought that all the events in the world's history are in the hand of the Master who was claiming their allegiance. And the strength of this encouragement would be increased by the fact that the writer goes on to show that cosmic and social events that were outstanding features in the life of the Empire—the smiting of land and sea, of rivers and fountains of water, of sun, moon, and stars, as well as social and political upheavals—bear the special rôle of trumpet-voices carrying to the consciences of men God's summons to repentance.

But this assertion, that all things are in the hand of Christ and are uttering God's will to men, only brings the perplexing problem of Christian sufferings into bolder relief. If Christ has all power, why does He permit His servants to be persecuted? The sufferings of the righteous only become more of a problem if God is over all.

The answer to this question—the main question of the Book—is given in the twelfth and thirteenth chapters. These chapters are the most important in the development of the writer's argument. They set forth the crisis in virtue of which the

catastrophes and judgments of God manifest in History cease to be voices of warning and become unmingled outpourings of wrath. They indicate the point in its history at which, in the writer's view, the Roman Empire came to the parting of the ways.

In the twelfth chapter, through the medium of a familiar Greek myth, the existence of an evil power that seeks to thwart Christ's purpose and to destroy His work is asserted. But victory has already been gained by the celestial forces, and Satan has been cast down from heaven. But on the earth, by allying himself with institutions that he can use as his tools, he can still maintain the contest against Christ. Such an institution he has found in the Roman Empire; and its claim to divinity is the concrete embodiment of its alliancee with him. In the promulgation of that claim the Empire had, in the writer's view, deliberately and definitely sold itself to Satan, and henceforth the only means by which the triumph of righteousness could be achieved was its destruction. Henceforth the catastrophic events in Nature and History that had once been voices of warning calling to repentance have become destroying judgments. The Trumpets have become Vials.

And, as being the projection in the lives of the followers of Jesus of this antagonism between Satan and Christ, the sufferings of the Christians had a spiritual significance. They in Asia were fighting the Lord's battle. They were treading the same royal road that He had trod to His glory. And as He had prevailed, so would they prevail. His faithful witnesses will stand by His side in the day of His complete triumph (xx. 4, 5). Even now, from the point of view of the eternal world, the loyal servants of Christ reign on the earth (v. 10).

But the writer further suggests that their struggle, all-important as it is to them, is only one phase of the perennial warfare that the servants of God are waging on the earth. It is but one step towards the far-distant goal, when every manifestation of evil shall have been defeated, and when all its power

shall be exhausted. Then the hope of the ages shall dawn. The new Heaven and the new earth shall appear, a fit stage for the perfected Society into whose life nothing that mars or destroys can ever enter. See below on the Permanent Value of the Book, and notes on xx. 7–10.)

By this spiritual philosophy addressed to the imagination of his readers the writer brings home to them that they were not to think it strange concerning the fiery trial among them, as though some strange thing were happening to them. History presents a dualism, but a dualism that is transient. Evil shall run its course; and all suffering on behalf of Christ is bringing nearer the final defeat of Satan and the triumph of the Kingdom of God.

2. But not less important for the writer's aim are other elements that from time to time break in upon the exposition of this spiritual philosophy. Superficially considered these seem to be interruptions to its progress; but a closer study shows that they are a skilful reinforcement of its power. Ever and anon, when some critical point of the argument has been reached, some stage in the unfolding of the progress of events at which the hearts of the sufferers are in danger of quailing before the ordeal, there is given an uplifting vision depicting the glory that will come to those who are faithful.

These visions contribute powerfully to the effecting of the purpose of the Book to strengthen and to inspire. They are an appeal to its readers through the quickened imagination to stand and to endure.

And the contrasted series of visions, depicting the fate of those who, from love of life, had yielded to the great apostasy, would constitute a legitimate appeal to their fears, urging them to cling to the testimony of Jesus. And this appeal would gain added weight from the fact that it was familiar figures—the false prophet who did his wonders before their eyes, the officials who walked their streets, and before whose tribunals they were dragged—that were represented as having made this weird

alliance with the prince of evil, and as passing on with all their pomp and power to the utter destruction of the lake of fire.

3. Of scarcely less significance for the author's purpose are the songs of praise which he permits his readers to overhear rising from the inhabitants of heaven. Their function in the Book has been compared to that of the Choral Odes in a Greek Tragedy. They are intended to help the minds of the Christians to a right understanding of the significance of the visions and to suggest to their hearts the fitting response of feeling. Through the medium of the ear they suggest the blessedness of those who will look back over the hard and rugged road by which they have travelled, and in the light of the triumph of the Lamb confess that even when life had been darkest God was leading them aright.

4. In the light of this practical purpose the relation that the introductory messages to the individual churches hold to the rest of the Book may be more clearly seen. In these messages the writer deals with the ordinary temptations and failures and successes of churches. He points out the virtues and the faults, the faithfulness and the fickleness of each community as the eye of Christ saw it ; commending where commendation was possible, warning where warning was needed ; laying bare the hidden causes of decaying spiritual vigour, and urging to remembrance and repentance and change of life. The explanation of these messages lies in the coming trial that the Christians of Asia were to endure. They are a summons to 'clear the decks for action.' They urge Christians to get rid of everything that would hamper or handicap them in the imminent struggle. That they may run with patience the race set before them, they must lay aside every weight, every sin, every failing that could hinder their progress. For only when at their best could they do their best.

In the Book of Revelation, then, we have a work written with the practical aim of stimulating the Christians of Asia to face with courage and endurance a situation of the utmost gravity.

From this purpose the writer does not for a moment withdraw his eyes. In a wonderful whole, compacted of reasoned theory, visions, songs of praise, personal appeal, every detail of phrase and word is made to contribute towards the total effect of persuasion and inspiration. A rich and penetrating genius, glowing with a lofty faith in Christ, has subdued material the most unpromising to produce through all the channels of influence — reason, imagination, heart—a cumulative force of conviction, which, we have every reason to believe, proved strong enough to counteract all the inducements and compulsions that the world was employing to make the Christians of Asia apostatise from Christ.

III. THE RELATION OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION TO KINDRED JEWISH LITERATURE.

So far we have found an adequate key to the general message of the Book in the historical situation that called it forth. But much still remains to be investigated. The medium through which the message has come is strange to our ears. Weird and grotesque images crowd the pages. Incidents that seem to have no possible relation to history are frequent. So obscure in many respects is the Book that some of the greatest saints and scholars of the Church have professed themselves able to make little of it, and have been repelled rather than attracted by it. On the other hand, its cryptic symbols have had a strange fascination for some minds, and the attempts that have been made to puzzle out their meaning have resulted in a bewildering variety of more or less fantastic interpretations. The reason for all this obscurity lies in the fact that until comparatively recent times the key to its sealed pages had not come to light. The Book belongs to the class of literature known as apocalyptic, of which many examples have been discovered and studied within recent years. Into that literature the ideas and imagery of the Book of Revelation send their roots. And to understand them we must gain some knowledge of the literature

as a whole, and of the relations which the N.T. Apocalypse holds to it.

A.—Apocalyptic Literature.

Jewish Apocalyptic thought was the lineal descendant of O.T. prophecy. Those who came to Israel in the name of the Lord not only opened up to their view a glorious prospect of worldly prosperity and blessing and far-reaching spiritual influence (Isa. ii. 2-5), but also promised so clear a knowledge of God's will and so intimate a fellowship with His Spirit, that the keeping of the Divine commandments would not be of the constraint of law, but of the intelligent and willing co-operation of spiritual consent (Jer. xxxi. 33 f.).

On the other hand, the message of the prophets shared in the limitation of their world view. Their outlook did not go beyond the present world. The horizon of the greatest of them was bounded by Sheol or the Grave. Their ideal of life was to be realised on earth. Their hopes gathered around the renewed Jerusalem, into which nothing that made life sad—mourning, the decay of old age, the vicissitudes of fortune, frustration of effort, absence of communion with God, mutual suspicion of the earth's inhabitants, the natural hostility between man and the brutes—would enter. There would be a new heaven and a new earth, and Jerusalem would be its centre (Isa. xxxv.).

Closely connected with this limitation was the other, that the prophetic view hardly took any note of the individual. It was the nation that was of interest to the predicter of glorious things. The individual and the generations passed away; to the prophets it was sufficient that the nation still lived to realise their vision.

This glorious prophetic vision of Israel walking in the light of the Lord was not destined to be realised. Again and again were they drawn aside by the licentious worships of their heathen neighbours. And this forsaking of God never failed to bring down upon them plagues and disasters which the prophets inter-

preted as Divine visitations for their sins. They staggered under the calamities that fell upon them. But the poison had gone too deep into the life for any remedy short of the most drastic to work a cure. The prophets themselves came to realise that only after a great purifying experience could their dreams come true. Israel must be lifted out of her own land, that under alien skies she might learn the goodness of the God whose patience she had so sorely tried. The remnant that would return would enter upon the possession of the prophetic hopes.

The threatened disaster came. Israel and Judah were carried into captivity. In due time there was the return of a remnant. But the prophet's dream did not come true. The transformed and glorified city did not appear. Even the hope of it gradually faded away. Never again, save during the shortlived gleam of Maccabæan dominion, was Israel an independent nation. One great Empire after another held sway over her, till at length the last hope of nationality was quenched in the fall of Jerusalem before the armies of Rome.

It is history that raises the ever recurring problems of the soul. As an adequate philosophy of history, the prophetic teaching had broken down. The bed was shorter than that a man could stretch himself upon it, and the covering narrower than that he could wrap himself in it. Thought must push out along new directions. The human mind must enlarge the place of its tent, and stretch forth the curtains of its habitation.

The new thought looked in the direction of the enlargement of what in the old scheme had been limited. The fundamental change to which history led was the widening of the horizon to embrace a life beyond the present. The significance of this advance has not perhaps been fully appreciated. There was no break in the cloud of heathen oppression. Zion was desolate while her enemies prospered. But faith in God was able to surmount the facts of history. God must triumph sometime; and if that triumph was not to take place within the present age, room must be found for it at a future time. The Kingdom of

Righteousness, in which God would be all in all, must be revealed.

But if the difference between the present and the future age was so absolute, it must be an event of no ordinary kind that would bridge the gulf from the one to the other. By no process of evolution could the Kingdom of God be brought into existence. The event that would inaugurate it must be one that would tear itself apart from history altogether. The old prophets were familiar with the idea of Divine intervention. They had spoken of the *Day of the Lord*. But to them the *Day of the Lord* meant some historical calamity—famine, pestilence, war—which would scourge the disobedient. Then history would resume its wonted course. But the new conception of the *Day of the Lord* meant the intervention of supra-historical forces to write a full-stop to the history of mankind, the coming of God's Judgment like a thief in the night.

This may be taken as the distinguishing note of Apocalyptic literature. To use a phrase applied by Dr. Denney to the literature of the N.T. as a whole, it is a 'literature of catastrophic expectation.'

In this Kingdom of Righteousness, the Messiah, God's Anointed One, was to be King. A perfectly consistent view of the Messiah is not to be looked for in a literature so vast and extending over so long a time. Sometimes the conception of Him is satisfied by an earthly prince, a Judas Maccabæus or a John Hyrcanus. Sometimes it rose to the height of a supernatural Being, whose pre-existence with God was to be continued on earth, at least for a time, to accomplish the Divine purpose. In the main, the expectation of a Messiah, who would subdue the oppressors of Israel and give her the supreme place, was entertained.

History also forced thinkers to take note of the individual. In the old scheme of thought the individual was a member of the nation and shared in its fortunes. But with foreign influences pouring in on every side, the nation no longer remained a unity.

Some received the alien influences with open arms, or at most offered but a feeble resistance to them; and others continued faithful to God and suffered for their loyalty. Were the righteous to pass away with no hope of deliverance, while the wicked, their murderers, continued to enjoy prosperity? No! The Justice that would one day bring the Kingdom of Righteousness would surely make some compensation to those who had passed away in the midst of oppression. Sheol would give up the dead that were in her, that they might enter into the blessedness of the Messianic Kingdom. All the faithful departed would arise to glory and joy (Isa. xxvi. 19).

It was impossible to go thus far and not go farther. If the hope of the resurrection of the blessed dead was entertained, the question of the fate of the wicked could not long fail to arise. There grew up the belief in a general resurrection and a Day of Judgment, on which not only men but fallen angels would have their everlasting fate assigned to them.

How far these ideas were borrowed, and how far they were wrought out by Jewish thinkers under the pressure of events, it would be hard to say. In the Exile, Israel was brought into contact with a nation in which religious speculation was far advanced. One Babylonian belief is important for the understanding of the Book of Revelation. It accounted for the presence of evil in the world by the hostility of two spiritual principles, to which it gave the names Marduk, Creator, and Tiâmat, chaos. Tiâmat was offering continual opposition to the will of Marduk, and of this opposition the history of mankind presented a single phase.

The literature in which this system of thought is presented possesses some well-marked distinctive features.

1. Apocalypses were written for the most part in times of persecution. Two periods of foreign domination were specially rich in such writings. The endeavour of Antiochus Epiphanes (175–154 B.C.) to suppress the Jews' religion and to hellenize Jewish life, laid down the main lines of apocalyptic for all time.

He found a party in Israel ready to further his projects, and it was against these that the faithful hurled their severest denunciations. It is of these that the Book of Daniel says that they are to awake to 'shame and everlasting contempt.' And again, the last conflict with Rome was fertile in writings of this class. Devout Jews could not believe that God would forsake His city and His Temple. The alternations of hope and fear that swept across the people are reflected in these writings of consolation, in which those who still trusted in God endeavoured to spread the contagion of their faith to others.[1] But when their hopes remained unrealised, a gloom settled down on the spirits of men. Well might they think that the end of all things was at hand when they saw the Holy and Beautiful House given over to destruction. And when Jerusalem became a Roman colony, and the remnant of Israel was dispersed, it need not be wondered at if the devout Jew saw no hope anywhere on earth, but strained his eyes for the first terror-striking signs of the *Day of the Lord.*

But not foreign oppression alone called forth this type of writing. The breach between the Pharisees and the Maccabæan priest-kings gave opportunity to the former to pour forth vials of wrath upon the latter. No words spoken against Antiochus or the Romans are more scathing than those hurled against the 'kings and the mighty,' the apostate Maccabæan rulers and the sceptical, oppressive Sadducean priests.

Thus while this literature is written to console and strengthen those who are faithful to God, it is bitterly denunciatory of those that fail in the day of trial or that oppress the pious. Perhaps no literature in the world is so empty of the milk of human kindness or of the Divine pity as apocalypse. If here and there a gleam of compassion lights up the hard merciless thoughts, 'it is a wintry gleam.' And the greatest of them all is hardly an exception to this. A time of persecution almost inevitably introduces hardness into the thinking and even into the heart.

2. Again, Jewish apocalypse abounds in imagery which is hard

[1] A fragment of these writings is perhaps preserved in Rev. xi. 1, 2.

to understand. Images received symbolic meanings which in time became conventional. An empire was symbolised by a wild beast, an angel by a star. Men were spoken of under the figures of animals, sheep, bulls, etc. The conception of the relation of God to man was modified. He was no longer thought of as holding direct communion with the world, but as surrounded by angels, archangels and other celestial beings, who were regarded as His ministers of revelation and working. Thus there was developed to an extent far beyond what is seen in the O.T. a cryptic system of imagery for the expression of spiritual ideas. To some extent this habit of secret writing may have been fostered by the necessities of the case. In the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, it may have been found safer that the treatises that were passed from hand to hand for the comfort of the pious should be written in a language not readily understood by the uninitiated. It might be dangerous for any one to be found in possession of a book like Daniel, if it were clear that the monarch who is there spoken of in terms so severe was Antiochus.

3. A third and curious feature of apocalyptic writings is that they are generally, if not always, pseudonymous. They were not written by those to whom they are attributed, nor do they belong to the periods to which they profess to belong. They are represented as revelations given to some ancient seer or saint, and are often accompanied by the command to seal them up till the time of the end, *i.e.*, till the period and the situation which in reality called them forth. Though they are made to bear, more or less, the colouring of the time when they claim to have been written, it is generally possible to penetrate the thin disguise and to discover the actual situation. Thus the Book of Daniel professes to give an account of one who remained faithful to the law of God during the exile in Babylon. In reality the Book was written in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes; for it gives a summary of Syrian history, and, in more minute detail, the chief events of that monarch's reign. It was natural that Enoch, of whom it was said that he 'walked with God,' should be regarded

as a likely recipient of revelations about the unseen. But careful examination of the Book of Enoch shows that it is less a book than a literature, whose component parts were written at different times and in response to varied historical occasions; and that the whole was brought together by an editor, who made such changes as give the book a superficial appearance of unity. So there are books attributed to Baruch, Ezra, the Twelve Patriarchs, Moses, Isaiah and others, all of which reflect the circumstances of later times. (See articles in Hastings' *B.D.*)

This characteristic of pseudonymity could not be due to the fact which has sometimes been advanced to explain it, that religious thinkers were no longer conscious, as were the prophets of old, of being able to go to the people with a 'Thus saith the Lord.' The apocalyptists must have felt that they were being inspired by great creative ideas. They could not but recognise that through the hard facts of history the hand of God was leading them into larger and richer conceptions of man's relation to the unseen world. But they may have felt that in the circumstances of the times it was almost hopeless to go to the people with a message from God that seemed so contradictory of the words of the great prophets; and that the thoughts from which they themselves drew comfort would be more likely to get a hearing from others if they were given under some name commanding an equal veneration. They may also have been moved by the danger of incurring the wrath of their enemies, especially if a tyrant or tyranny were in power. Further, to attribute the revelation to an ancient seer absolved the writer from the necessity of explaining it or the method in which he had received it. For these reasons some writer may at first have adopted a foreign literary device, which by and by became conventional in this kind of writing.

B.—The Book of Revelation.

To this vast heritage of religious speculation, couched in a language and imagery that had become conventional, the writers

of the N.T. fell heir. While considerable traces of apocalyptic are found in almost all the writings of the N.T., the Book of Revelation as a whole must be placed in this class of literature. Its whole scheme of thought is apocalyptic. It has been said that in its eschatological ideas it does not advance beyond the Book of Enoch. That this is in the main true is clearly seen if we compare with it the Apocalypse of Weeks, an interesting fragment incorporated in the Book of Enoch and dated by Dr. Charles as belonging to 134–95 or 104–95 B.C.

'And after that (the 7th week of apostasy) there shall be another,
the eighth week, that of righteousness,
And a sword shall be given to it that a righteous judgment may
be executed on the oppressors,
And sinners shall be delivered into the hands of the righteous.
And at its close they shall acquire houses through their righteousness,
And a house shall be built for the Great King in glory for evermore,
And all mankind shall look to the path of uprightness.
And after that, in the ninth week, the righteous judgment shall be
revealed to the whole world,
And all the works of the godless shall vanish from the earth.
And the world shall be written down for destruction.
And after this, in the tenth week in the seventh part,
There shall be the great eternal judgment,
In which He will execute judgment amongst the angels.
And the first heaven shall depart and pass away,
And a new heaven shall appear,
And all the powers of the heavens shall give sevenfold light.
And after that there will be many weeks without number for ever,
And all shall be in goodness and righteousness,
And sin shall no more be mentioned for ever.'[1]

It is impossible not to perceive that the outline of the events of the end in the Book of Revelation runs parallel to this scheme. The Great Apostasy, Cæsar-worship, by the glamour of which Christians were in danger of being drawn away from Christ, is followed by a period of conflict against evil which, in apocalypses, is technically called 'the period of the sword,' and in which evil

[1] Book of Enoch xci. 12-17, Charles's edition.

is overcome. Then follows the reign of the righteous (xx. 1–6). Thereafter comes the General Judgment (xx. 11–15). And the scheme closes with the picture of the new heaven and the new earth, with the Holy City descending out of heaven from God, into which nothing that defileth shall enter. Yet there is one interesting difference in detail which shows that John's is no slavish imitation. In the Apocalypse of Weeks the sword is put into the hand of the righteous; in the Book of Revelation the victory is achieved by the Messiah, while the saints are merely spectators of it and sharers in its blessed fruits. This difference has its explanation in historical conditions. There were times, as in the Maccabæan struggle, when resistance might be of some use; but for the Christians of Asia Minor to attempt it would be madness.

The description of the Messiah as a blood-stained warrior also is in agreement with apocalypse, though the real scheme of thought of the Book of Revelation requires that its conception of Him as the Lamb that was slain should be central. That the writer could find place in his Book for two so diverse figures to depict one and the same person seems to be explicable only on the supposition that the one is derived and conventional; while in the other, the Lamb that was slain, we have his true conception on which he grounded all his hopes for the redemption of human life. Further, he may have given a place in his Book to the apocalyptic figure from the feeling that his readers may not yet have so learned Christ as to realise that the *Lamb that was slain* rather than *the blood-stained warrior* is the true emblem of the conquering power of God.

In its explanation of the existence of evil, too, the Book of Revelation is in the main at one with apocalyptic thought. The apocalypses explained sin as due in one way or another to Satanic intervention in the world's affairs. In the Book of Revelation evil is represented as the result of Satan opening the pit of the abyss and letting loose a cloud of scorpion-locusts, demonic powers; and, in the most aggravated form then known,

as the result of a definite alliance between Satan and the world power, the Roman Empire.

Many other details in the Book are derived from current apocalyptic thought. The millennial reign round which so much polemic has raged is taken from the Book of the Secrets of Enoch, which was probably being written when Our Lord was upon the earth. The first resurrection, the binding of the old serpent, the lake of fire, the tree of life, the ministry of angels, and many other ideas and figures are part of the heritage that was received from the past.

Points of difference between the Book of Revelation and Jewish apocalypses. It is not in the points of agreement with former apocalypses, however, but in the message peculiar to itself that the supreme value of the Book of Revelation lies. These points of difference we shall try to set forth.

1. In appealing to the churches in Asia in a document bearing his own name the writer broke away from what had been the almost invariable practice of apocalyptists. The hypothesis of pseudonymous authorship by which some have proposed to bring this Book into line with Jewish apocalypses may be at once dismissed. Whoever the writer was, there can be no doubt that his name was John, and that he was personally known to and trusted by the Christians of Asia. Moreover, there is no command, as in the Book of Daniel and the Book of Enoch, to seal up the mysteries in the Book. On the contrary, the seer is told to write for a present or an imminent crisis. 'What thou seest write in a book, and send to the seven churches that are in Asia.' 'And he saith unto me, Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book; for the time is at hand.' These two features together amount to the assertion of a claim to bring a message direct from God as the old prophets had done. And this claim is further emphasised by the form that the Book takes. Paul and others had already employed the letter form to communicate instruction and warning and exhortation to their converts from whom they were temporarily absent. And the

Book of Revelation is a Christian letter. This is clearly seen if we treat the first three verses as no part of the writing as it came from John's hand (see notes *in loco*). We have then in ver. 4 the natural way in which an absent teacher would begin a communication to his disciples, 'John to the seven churches which are in Asia,' followed by the Christian greeting—the way in which Paul's letters invariably begin. The Book, then, is a true letter, which was the most direct way of speaking to his flock that a teacher could adopt when prevented from addressing them by word of mouth.

Now all these considerations combine to show that the writer is making a claim to bring a message direct from God to his readers. He claims to be a prophet. The value of the message to those who received it, the chance of its being able to win a hearing at all, lay in its directness.

2. But a more important feature differentiates the Book of Revelation from Jewish apocalypses, the change that had come upon Messianic thought through the advent of Jesus. Pious Jews had looked forward to a time when God would break in upon history for the setting up of His Kingdom. The Christians looked backward to the Advent of Jesus into the world as marking the establishment of that Kingdom among men. And this new point of view had the effect of altering the centre of gravity in apocalyptic thought. It made what was primary in Jewish apocalypse become secondary in the Book of Revelation. The apocalypses, in as far as they spoke to the needs of their time, drew their consolation from the scheme of events that they predicted. Though in the present age the wicked lorded it over the righteous, the *Day of the Lord* was coming, when men and angels would be judged and all that was wrong would be put right. The great compensations would be made. Those who had received their good things on earth would then receive evil things; while those who had received evil things in the world would enjoy their good things in the world to come. The wicked would be tormented, and the righteous would be comforted.

And this was to be brought about in God's time, and through the agency that He saw fit to employ. It was in emphasising the certainty of this scheme of events that the force of apocalyptic appeal lay; and every art is laid under contribution in the apocalypses to give assurance of the truth of it.

But can any one read the N.T. Apocalypse and say that it is on this old scheme of apocalyptic thought that the writer relies for the encouragement of his readers? Was it by the revelations that were supposed to have been made to Enoch that he hoped to inspire them to endure? Could he only point forward to a coming *Day of the Lord*, when all that was most wrong would be made right, and when those who were persecuted for righteousness' sake would enter upon the Kingdom of Heaven? Very different from that is the ground of his consolation. The coming of Christ into the world had made all things new. The Messiah and the Messianic Kingdom were no longer vague expectations, but real powers in the world. Even now the kingdom of Satan and the Kingdom of God were facing each other, and on the stage of human life these manifested themselves as the Empire and the Church. The question that is being asked throughout the Book of Revelation resolves itself into this: 'Is it the Church or the Empire that is to win in this conflict over Cæsar-worship?' And the answer is that the Church shall win, because only in the principle that it stands for does there lie any hope of progress for the world. On any other principle there is no prospect but anarchy and chaos. And all who are faithful to Christ in the struggle are passing on to a share in His victory and authority on the earth. As it is a world-conflict that is depicted, so it is a victory on the earth that is promised to the followers of the Lamb.

This is the answer that the writer works out through nineteen and a half chapters of the Book. He is dealing with a historical, not an eschatological problem. Only after grappling with the historical situation does he proceed to unfold to its completion the apocalyptic scheme, and shows that the history of the world

must issue in a General Judgment and in a final separation of the righteous and the wicked.

The real message of the Book, then, is to be found in the new place that Christ had taken in human life. The elements that are purely apocalyptic have a secondary, one might almost say an accidental place. The old bottles are used ; but it is new wine that is put into them. Current apocalyptic forms and imagery are employed as the medium of expression. But it is truths that have not hitherto been within the reach of thought that they are made to convey. The old apocalypses breathe despair of the present age, and look forward with hope to a future time. Their explanation of the evil of the world was that God was absent from it, that He had left it to itself, that He was permitting the temporary dominion of arrogance and brute force. He would intervene one day, but that day was not yet. Meanwhile the world was given over to the oppressor. But the teaching of the Book of Revelation is that the world and all its affairs are already in the hand of Christ. Its forces and its history are under His control. Its phenomena are His voices of warning summoning to repentance. If unheeded, they will turn to vials of wrath in the hands of His angels of judgment. The sufferings that His followers are being called to endure are befalling them, not because He is absent, but because He is present, and is waging a victorious warfare against all the powers that still stand for Satan in the world.

While, therefore, the Book of Revelation adopts the old apocalyptic mould, the content that is poured into it is new with the newness which Christ has given to all things. Its central truth is that Christ is even now, through the struggle of history, giving the victory to righteous causes in the world, and that He will ultimately bring about the full and final triumph of good. This opening up of hope for the present age seems to be a return from the apocalyptic to the prophetic point of view. But it is a return bringing all the gains of apocalyptic thought with it. The wider horizon, the resurrection, the Judgment, the life beyond, and

many other ideas of which the prophets did not dream, lend a deeper meaning and value even to this life. Through these ideas we may even now live under the power and inspiration of the world to come, so that from the commonest actions of daily life may be the issues of the life everlasting.

IV. THE DATE.

It has already been assumed that the Book of Revelation belongs to the last quarter of the first century A.D. But many scholars have accepted a date more or less Neronic as best explaining certain passages in the Book. A fuller examination of the available evidence, however, has brought a number of more recent scholars to the position that the traditional date is not only the more likely, but that, indeed, it is the only possible one.

Those who adopted the earlier date laid stress on one passage in the Book which at first sight seems clearness itself. In the description of the harlot city in chap. xvii. 10f. we read, 'The seven heads are seven kings: the five are fallen, the one is, the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a little while. And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is of the seven; and he goeth into perdition.' It would seem to be easy to select the sixth from the list of imperial names. But, as has been pointed out in the notes upon this verse, two sources of uncertainty make any conclusion based on it extremely precarious. Its worthlessness for fixing the date is seen in the fact that different scholars relying on it have placed the Book in the reigns of Claudius, Nero, Galba, Vespasian, and Titus.

Other considerations have been held as supporting the early date. The Church was passing through persecution, or persecution was imminent. This has been supposed to be Nero's assault upon the Christians. But it is doubtful whether Nero's persecution extended much beyond Rome, or at all events

became so severe in the provinces as to constitute such a crisis as the Book of Revelation has in view. Further, as will be made clear later, the ground of persecution by Nero was different from that which is set forth in this Book.

Again, chap. xi. 2 has been cited as pointing to a time when the temple was still standing, and when the expectation was still possible that even in its extremity it would be delivered. But this is one of a number of passages borrowed from earlier literature and incorporated in the Book. The Christian use of such a passage was possible only if the material temple to which it originally referred had passed away, and it could without ambiguity be applied to the Church, the spiritual temple.

The traditional date has strong arguments in its support. It rests primarily on the testimony of Irenæus, who says, that it was written not long ago, but 'close upon our time, at the end of the reign of Domitian.' And he would seem to have had exceptional opportunities of knowing the facts of the case.

Other considerations support the later date. The epistles to the individual churches suggest that these have a fairly long history behind them. They have travelled, some of them far, from their pristine zeal. The warnings of Paul spoken to the elders of Ephesus had come true (Acts xx. 29*b*). But this peril had passed, and a time of activity and purity and vigour had followed, probably under the influence of John. (See on letters to individual churches.)

But the argument that is conclusive for the later date is that the attitude of the Empire towards the Church, as set forth in this Book, is very different from what it was in the time of Nero. Paul could dream of being able to convert the Empire to Jesus. In the pursuit of his mission he took advantage of its institutions as he made use of its roads. He fell back upon its protection against his opponents. The Empire had not yet awakened to the consciousness of how irreconcilable were its claims and insti-

tutions with the ideals of the Church. But the situation as presented in this Book has developed. Between the Empire and the Church there is uncompromising opposition. The Empire demands as the proof of loyalty what the Church in faithfulness to its Divine Lord cannot give. The description of the great harlot as 'drunk with the blood of the saints and of the martyrs of Jesus' must be understood, according to Mommsen, as referring to those who were condemned in the eastern provinces and sent to Rome for execution. But this represents a settled policy on the part of the Empire towards the Church which is natural in the time of Domitian, impossible in the time of Nero. Domitian officially claimed to be styled 'Our Lord and God.' (See Introduction, Sect. I., and also notes on xvii. 11.)

It is impossible to fix the date within narrower limits, only because the history of Asia is wrapt in obscurity. In general terms we are able to describe the occasion that constituted the crisis—the granting of a new temple-wardenship, the dedication of a new image of Cæsar, a more rigorous effort to enforce the cultus in some one of the cities of Asia. So wonderful has been the light that recent discoveries have thrown upon N.T. times, that we need not despair that some piece of evidence may yet turn up that will enable us to fix more exactly the date of the situation that is so vividly set forth in the thirteenth chapter.

V. THE AUTHOR.

The Book of Revelation claims to have been written by one who speaks of himself simply as John. Evidently well known to the churches of Asia, by name and perhaps in person, he has no doubt of finding in the hearts of his readers the response accorded to a beloved, revered, and trusted teacher.

The relation in which he stands to them is therefore not official but personal. He speaks of himself as their brother, and partaker with them in the tribulation and kingdom and patience

which are in Jesus. The message which he gives to them is one which he himself had needed, and from which he had derived strength and assurance.

This message he had received from Christ. In many ways it is made clear that it was not the product of his own thinking or the creation of his own imagination, but an authentic revelation of spiritual things in the secret place of the soul's communion with God. Again and again he states that he was 'in the spirit.' He speaks of his message as a prophecy. In his own peculiar way he says, 'Thus saith the Lord.' The command to write first came from Christ's own lips (i. 11); and frequently he receives directions to record things that are of special importance. The author was one, then, who occupied such a place in the eye of the Church that he could claim to be the recipient of a lofty spiritual experience, and could expect that the vision would be accepted on his testimony.

Further, he was a Jew whose mind was steeped in Jewish literature, both O.T. and apocalyptic. But he had lived long in Asia, and shows intimate knowledge of local feeling and ability to estimate the contemporary situation of the Church.

This is all that the Book itself warrants us in saying about the author. Have we anything to help us towards a more definite knowledge?

The bulk of most ancient testimony assigns the Book to John the son of Zebedee, the Disciple and Apostle of Our Lord. So strong is the external evidence that, were it not for internal grounds, it would probably never have occurred to any one to question his authorship. The tradition is almost unbroken down to the middle of the third century; and it is strongest in those regions in which the Book took its rise. Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, not far from Laodicea; Justin Martyr, who was born a few years after the Book was written and who wrote his *Dialogue with Trypho* at Ephesus; Irenæus, bishop of Lyons, a native of Asia, who had been a disciple of Polycarp, the disciple of John; Melito, bishop of Sardis, who wrote a treatise

on the Book—all these concur in accepting it as the work of John the Apostle.

The chief difficulty of assigning this Book to John the Apostle arises from the fact that tradition is equally strong in asserting that he is the author of the Fourth Gospel also. The question resolves itself into these two inquiries: Was it one and the same that wrote these two books? If not, which of them is to be assigned to the Apostle?

To take the two questions in their order. I. Can we attribute the two books to one and the same person? It is perhaps safe to say that but for the strong external testimony, no one would ever have dreamt of assigning the two books to the same author. Consideration of the question may fitly start from Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria (247–265), and successor of Origen as head of the catechetical school there, 'a man of earnest piety, good sense, moderation, and Christian charity' (Salmon). In the interests of the Johannine authorship of the Fourth Gospel, he refused to ascribe the Apocalypse to the Apostle. In support of this verdict he puts forward the following arguments: 1. The writer of the Gospel and the Epistle does not mention his name, which the writer of the Apocalypse does over and over again. 2. Such words as life, light, truth, grace, joy, the flesh and blood of the Lord, judgment, forgiveness of sins, the love of God towards us, the judgment of the world, of the devil, of antichrist, the promise of the Holy Spirit, the adoption of the sons of God, are constantly used by the one, and seldom if ever by the other. 3. The Gospel and Epistle are written in good and idiomatic Greek, free from all barbarism or solecism or idiotism of language. 'As to the other, I do not perceive in him an accurate acquaintance with the Greek language.' These are still the main arguments against the common authorship of the Gospel and the Apocalypse.

1. There is not much weight in the argument that while the author does not mention his name in the Gospel and the Epistle, he does so in the Book of Revelation. Difference of circum-

stances might prescribe a different method. It would be necessary, or at least desirable, that such a message as that of the Apocalypse should come to those for whom it was intended, not anonymously, but with all the weight that a revered name could lend to it.

2. The argument from language and style is still formidable. Its strength is, of course, almost altogether concealed when we are dealing with a translation. No book of the New Testament, perhaps no great book in literature, gains in a sense so much from appearing in a foreign dress. The language of the Apocalypse shows a bewildering indifference to the ordinary rules of Greek grammar. Plural verbs are used where we should expect singulars, and *vice versa*; prepositions are followed by the nominative of the word they govern; nominatives stand in apposition to genitives and other cases; and other usages which are ordinarily called ungrammatical abound. Attempts have been made, and, it must be confessed, not without a measure of success, to show that these characteristics are not due in all cases to ignorance of the Greek language, but that many of them arise from the author's thinking in Hebrew while writing in Greek. Yet, when all allowances have been made, it is very difficult to resist the impression that two books in styles so different could hardly have come from the same hand within a few years of one another.

The suggestion that the Apocalypse was written first, shortly after the Apostle took up his residence in Asia and before he had thoroughly mastered the Greek language, while the Gospel belongs to his old age after many years of contact with Greek-speaking peoples, becomes untenable when the early date of the Book is given up. As has been shown, the Book has behind it a long residence in the atmosphere of Asian church-life, and no great interval of time can separate it from the Gospel.

The hypothesis has been put forward that one of the books may have been written through an amanuensis, who corrected

all errors in grammar. If Paul wrote his letters in this way, as we know he did, why not John? This leads us to the third argument of Dionysius. The differences go far deeper than such external features as language and style.

When we try to get behind the books to the texture of the minds that produced them, we find a great gulf fixed. The two minds look upon spiritual realities in totally different ways. The writer of the Book of Revelation looks out, while the writer of the Gospel looks in. The one clothes his thoughts in picturesque imagery; the other conceives them in the form of immaterial ideas. The mind of the one is concrete, imaginative, pictorial; that of the other, abstract, meditative, mystical. The Fourth Gospel speaks of the Light that lighteth every man, of the Spirit that is with him in his most secret life; the Apocalypse regards inspiration as an outward revelation to eye and ear, as the communication of information by an angel or an elder, as the result of devouring a written volume. In the Gospel the evil of the world is the manifestation of a spiritual affinity, of a diabolic heredity; in the Apocalypse it is the effect of Satan opening the pit of the abyss, or, in its most aggravated form, of an alliance between a diabolic and a world power. In the Gospel all judgment is committed unto the Son because He is the Son of Man, and by the standard of His perfect humanity are all men tried; in the Apocalypse, Judgment is represented by a great white throne and the opening of books wherein are recorded all the deeds that men have done in the body. The horizon of the Fourth Gospel is bounded in the main by the Jewish nation: while the vision of the seer embraces the whole Roman Empire with its tributary States, and even the barbarians beyond its confines are not entirely outside his ken.

Even where the two books seem to come into contact in a common name or phrase, further thought often reveals that the contact is only apparent. The Word is a name given to Christ in both. But in the Gospel it implies His pre-existent state, His creative energy, His self-communication to the spirits of men;

while in the Apocalypse He is a conquering King, riding on a white horse with His vesture reddened with the blood of His enemies. In the Gospel, Christ is called the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world; but, while this is still the favourite name for Christ in the Apocalypse and while expiation of sin still underlies the name, the outstanding function of the Lamb there is to control the course of history, and to give victory and sovereignty on the earth to those that are His. (See also notes on i. 7.) All that can be safely argued from such points of contact is that they suggest that the books had their rise in the same circle of disciples.

Perhaps a still deeper contrast between the books lies in their tone and spirit. The Gospel is a book rich in mercy, overflowing with the wonderful compassion of Jesus. In the Apocalypse the love that yearned over the sinful world is not prominent. One can hardly think it possible that the disciple of love could have written a book in which Jesus holds so large a place, and yet be able to keep His compassion for sinners so completely out of sight.

II. But we come now to the other question. If both cannot be assigned to the same author, which are we to give to the Apostle? Is it to be the Book of Revelation?

It has been urged that the character of the son of Zebedee as it is described in the Synoptics is such as we would suppose to belong to one from whose pen a book like the Apocalypse might come. Was not he, whose mistaken zeal would have called down fire from heaven upon a miserable blinded village, just the kind of man to utter this terrible invective against the enemies of Christ? But even if we grant that an old man of ninety would be capable of the fiery energy that burns in the Book, surely the intercourse of John with Jesus must have gone for little if, more than sixty years after the Crucifixion, the disciple had still to learn the mind of Christ. And further, there are traditions of John's old age with which there is little in the Apocalypse that has agreement, *e.g.* that he had himself carried to the church door, where he

met the people with ever the one greeting: 'Little children, love one another.'

> 'Dante once prepared to paint an angel:
> Whom to please? You whisper "Beatrice."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> You and I would rather see that angel,
> Painted by the tenderness of Dante,
> Would we not?—than read a fresh Inferno.'

But if the claim of the Apostle has to be withdrawn, is there any other to whom the Book can be attributed with any degree of confidence? A phantom personage has been resuscitated in modern times to bear the burden of authorship. Papias is reported to have mentioned two Johns, John the Apostle, and John the Presbyter or Elder. And Dionysius catches at the hint. He does not clearly affirm his belief that the Presbyter is the author. He merely throws out the suggestion for want of a better.

Whether the dim figure of the Presbyter will become clearer with the discoveries of time remains to be seen. It is interesting that the authorship of a book in many ways kindred, the Epistle to the Hebrews, has been attributed in comparatively modern times by a happy conjecture to Apollos, with whose name it was not associated in any early tradition. It may be that the claim of the Presbyter will gain ground. But should the Apocalypse remain anonymous, it will only resemble in that particular some of the greatest books of the Bible and of the world.

One thing is of the utmost significance, that for the first readers the value of the Book did not rest on any official authority. It was not because it came under the sign-manual of an Apostle that it brought cheer and strength to the harassed souls of the Asian Christians; but because it had already comforted the spirit of a brother in tribulation and in the kingdom and patience that are in Jesus. While, therefore, its being attributed to the Apostle John may have helped to preserve it

for the Church through times when its mysterious thought was little understood, it is its inherent courage and confidence in trial that gives it its value for all time.

VI. THE PERMANENT VALUE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION.

The Book of Revelation was written primarily to meet a crisis in the life of the churches of Asia at the close of the first century. That it accomplished its aim we cannot doubt. The thrill that we still feel as we read its sublime pages must have been felt more strongly by those whose circumstances it so faithfully reflects. The Asian Christians responded to its appeal; and, in accordance with its promise, Cæsar-worship went down before the faith of Christ.

But were the significance and value of the Book exhausted in the crisis that called it forth? Has it no message, has it no power, for later ages? Is it now merely an interesting historical document, which opens a window through which we can look into those far-off times, and catch a glimpse of the heroic life and strenuous conflict of the Early Church? No such view can account for the place that it holds as part of the heritage from the past. While it primarily belongs to its own time, it has a value for all time. To an extent which perhaps the writer did not realise, he was fulfilling the word of the angel: 'Thou must prophesy again over many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.'

But naturally it is to those times in which the situation that it contemplates has been most closely reproduced that it speaks with most compelling and most consoling voice. That the writer expected that such times would again arise in the world's history is suggested even in its pages. No single victory, however decisive it may seem for one particular issue, exhausts the hostility of Satan to God. When the Church shall have triumphed over the Empire, even then 'the one far-off divine

event, to which the whole creation moves' will not have come. When the glow of the victory shall have faded from the world, some novel form of evil will raise its head, and against it the Church will have to accept battle anew. This seems to be the most natural meaning of that strange passage, xx. 7–9. (See notes.) The history of mankind is a transient dualism in which repeated defeats of Satan are more and more decisively establishing the ascendancy of the Kingdom of righteousness in which God shall be all in all.

Thus across the life of every age stretches the wide-flung battle-front on which the forces of God and of Satan face one another. Oftentimes the conflict is undistinguished and almost quiescent. But at times, on certain parts of the line, it kindles up into a life and death struggle, and demands for supreme courage and endurance are made upon the soldiers of Christ. And this old battle-song, with the inspiring strains that strengthened the hearts of the Christians of Asia, wakes courage in those who stand for Christ in these latter days. The Lamb that was slain has the book of the world's destiny in His hands. And all who stand with Him in the battle tried and faithful, shall stand with Him in the end of the day, and at the end of all the days, sharers in His glory and victory.

It may not be inconsistent with the historical interpretation of the Book to look over the 1900 years that have elapsed since it was written, and see how, sometimes on a wider and sometimes on a narrower stage, this struggle has always been going on, sometimes hardly distinguishable from peace, but at other times, which have proved epoch-making, breaking forth into fury and agony.

Can we not discern one such in the religious revolution of the fifteenth century? The Church of Christ itself had become the habitation of all unclean and worldly things. Insatiable in its lust for power, it neglected its stewardship of Divine things and its wardenship over the souls of men in the pursuit of wealth and earthly dominion. So far as its heads and rulers were con-

cerned it had ceased to be a spiritual force, and had become a rival with the princes of the earth for the supreme place in the world. It laid its hand upon the spirit of man, and became the enslaver and polluter of life. But the human spirit, becoming conscious of the freedom with which Christ had made it free, and relying upon His promise to be with His people in all their struggles, cast the yoke from its shoulders ; and in the conflict of the Reformation, positions were gained for righteousness from which there will be no drawing back.

Can we not see another phase of the same long-continued fight in the struggle over slavery that marked the first half of the last century? That institution was an embodiment of evil, long continued and long tolerated. But gradually the repugnance of slavery to the ideals of Christianity became more and more emphasised. And in the life of the United States, at a tremendous cost of blood and sorrow, the battle was fought and won, once and for ever.

Not along wide fronts alone is the battle joined. The lives of little nations have their share in it. In the Covenanting days of Scotland religious freedom was secured, never again to be lost out of the nation's life. Even within the bounds of an African village, where newly found Christianity finds itself in conflict with the institutions of the old heathenism, and stubbornly suffers and resists till its claims to spiritual liberty are conceded, the battle and victory may be visibly repeated.

It is a prejudice of the human mind to look to ages that are past for everything that can be called heroic ;

> 'As if the past should always win
> A glory from its being far ;
> And orb into the perfect star
> We saw not, when we moved therein.'

Yet considering the possibilities that lie in all the present horror and confusion among the nations of Europe, may we not see in the present war, on a scale which may compare with even this

historic situation in Asia, a recrudescence of the evil power challenging the right of Christ to reign in the world? We see the whole resources of one of the most highly gifted of modern nations captured in the interest of a world-ambition and lust for power. Science has forced from Nature her deepest secrets only to direct them into channels of destruction. The principles of social organisation, the benefits of education, the toil and travail of many years, are all visibly concentrated, in opposition to the rights and liberties of other nations, in an attempt to suppress the life of smaller peoples, to buttress cynical acts of repudiation of covenants, and to carry out the will of the strong by means that shock the enlightened conscience of mankind. 'The impression left upon the mind by the contemplation of all this is that the will of humanity is being thwarted and mocked. It is as though another will, not human, had wrested the control of man's affairs from the hands of man and set him at variance with himself—a malign will, which asserts its mastery by forcing civilisation to use the choicest fruits of the ages as weapons of offence against humanity. . . . Humanity is treated as if it were prey to that section of the human race which can prove itself the most violent and the most astute. This is the mind of Mephistopheles.'[1]

This diagnosis of the present struggle brings it into line with the situation in Asia as John interpreted it. There is the determination which characterised the Roman Empire to attain an evil end by all the resources of might and force, of knowledge and science, of astuteness and cunning. And there is the obligation to be faithful unto death in the defence of the spiritual ideals that are associated with the religion of Jesus. And to those who are striving to fulfil that obligation the Book of Revelation comes with its old message. Its imagery no longer makes the old appeal. Much of its teaching has to be modified or even cast away. The mind upon which the Cross of Christ is casting an ever deepening spell must come to see that the utter

[1] *Hibbert Journal*, October 1914.

destruction of the lake of fire cannot be God's last word to any of His children who, like the majority of the pagan Romans, unwittingly ally themselves with some form of diabolic activity; that God has ways of dealing with rebel man to which the agony of the situation strangely blinded the eyes of the seer of Patmos. The destruction of the mystic Babylon was not so much that of individuals or of the material city as of the evil principles of which Rome was the instrument. 'The greatness that was Rome' survives in many ways—in law, in administration, in a literature which, in spite of its paganism, mirrors justly and nobly many permanent features of human life, and utters deep truths in 'an organ voice to resound to all ages.' The Rome that perished 'hopeless and abhorred' was the Rome which glorified, and was the glory of, the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the vainglory of life. Yet when everything in the Book of Revelation that is transient or of secondary value has been discounted, there still remains its central message of strength and courage to all who are fighting the battle of the Lord. The government of the world is in the hands of Christ. The hopes of mankind are bound up with Christianity. The Beatitudes of Jesus, and not the maxims of Bernhardi, are the charter of human progress. All who stand with Jesus and are faithful to causes that have His benediction upon them shall triumph in the day when the cause for which they have lived and perhaps died shall have come to its own. And every such victory is a step by which the perfected Society draws near, of which it is said, 'They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.'

VII. OUTLINE OF THE BOOK.

THE TITLE.

A DESCRIPTIVE AND LITURGICAL INTRODUCTION FROM THE STANDPOINT OF A SOMEWHAT LATER AGE (i. 1–3).

THE BOOK PROPER.

A LETTER TO STRENGTHEN THE CHURCHES OF ASIA IN A CRISIS OF THEIR HISTORY.

I. PROLOGUE.

Narrating the circumstances of John's call to be Christ's messenger to the churches (i. 4–20).

1. Greeting and doxology (4–8).
2. A vision of the Risen Lord (9–20).

II. SPECIAL MESSAGES TO THE INDIVIDUAL CHURCHES (II. AND III.).

To Ephesus (ii. 1–7); Smyrna (8–11); Pergamum (12–17); Thyatira (18–29); Sardis (iii. 1–6); Philadelphia (7–13); Laodicea (14–22).

III. A REVELATION GIVEN TO JOHN OF THE COURSE OF HISTORY IN THE LIGHT OF THE SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING IT; AND IN PARTICULAR AN INTERPRETATION OF THE CRISIS THROUGH WHICH THE CHURCH WAS PASSING. A RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY (IV.–XIX.).

THE WRITER'S RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY.

A. ITS FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE—THE GODHEAD (iv.–v.).

1. God the Creator (iv.).
2. The Redemptive element in the Godhead The Lamb that was slain, revealed as alone able to make the will of God prevail on the earth (v.).

B. A VISION OF HISTORY EVOLVING UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE LAMB. THE OPENING OF THE SEALED BOOK OF THE WORLD'S DESTINY (vi.).

The seals opened, and elemental forces brought on the stage:
Invasion (vi. 1–2); War (3–4); Famine (5–6); Pestilence (7–8): Persecution (9–11); Earthquake and Eclipse (12–17).

Anticipatory Visions to strengthen the Christians in view of coming Trials (vii.).

1. A vision assuring the safety of God's people (1–8).
2. A vision of the glorified state of those who have endured tribulation (9–17).

C. The Seventh Seal opened, unfolding itself in a sevenfold series of Phenomena which are God's Voices of Warning summoning to Repentance—The Trumpets (viii.–ix.).

1. The prayers of the martyrs accepted (viii. 1–6).
2. The trumpets sounded:

   1st. The blight upon the land (7); 2nd. The diminution of the productiveness of the sea (8–9); 3rd. The smiting of the rivers and fountains (10–11); 4th. The diminution of light (12); 5th. The entrance of Satanic and demonic forces (ix. 1–11); 6th. Parthian invasion (13–19). (An announcement that the Trumpet Judgments have failed in their aim (20).)

The episode of the little book, indicating that the writer has reached the part of the vision that bears upon the condition and demands the faith of his readers (x.).

Anticipatory Visions designed to strengthen the Christians in view of the Sounding of the Seventh Trumpet (xi. 1–13).

1. A vision assuring safety to those who are God's, with a suggestion of the danger of apostasy (1–2).
2. A vision setting forth 'the natural history of witness-bearing' (3–13).

D. The Seventh Trumpet sounded. The Establishment of the Kingdom of Christ announced (15–19). Transition from the stage when phenomena of history are regarded as 'voices of warning' to that in which they are 'outpourings of wrath.'

1. The transcendental aspect of the transition (xii.).
   (*a*) The antagonists, the man-child and the dragon (1–6).
   (*b*) The defeat of Satan in Heaven (7–12).
   (*c*) The transference of the conflict to earth (13–17).
2. The historical aspect of the transition (xiii.).
   (*a*) The alliance of Satan with the beast from the sea, the Roman Empire (xiii. 1–10).
   (*b*) The executive of the beast from the sea, the beast from the land—the native council of Asia (11–18).
3. A series of visions to strengthen the Christians:
   (*a*) The safety and joy of the faithful (xiv. 1–5).
   (*b*) The angel with the eternal gospel (5–6).
   (*c*) The fall of Babylon announced (8).
   (*d*) The fate of apostates (9–12).
   (*e*) The blessedness of the martyrs (13).
   (*f*) The certainty of the end—the harvest and the vintage (14–20).

E. The Outpourings of Wrath (xv. and xvi.).

1. Preparatory (xv.).
   (*a*) A vision of the Church victorious (xv. 1–4).
   (*b*) The vials given to the angels of Judgment (5–8).
2. The vials outpoured (xvi.):
   1st. On the land (2); 2nd. On the sea (3); 3rd. Into the rivers and fountains (4–7); 4th. On the sun (8–9); 5th. On the throne of the beast (10–11); 6th. On the Euphrates (12–16); 7th. On the air (17–21).

F. A more detailed Account of the mystic Babylon and her Destruction (xvii., xviii.).

1. Description of Babylon (xvii.).
   (*a*) The harlot-persecutor—the City (1–6, 18).
   (*b*) The beast on which she sat—the Empire (7–17).
2. The destruction of Babylon (xviii.).
   (*a*) Her fall announced (1–3).
   (*b*) The destruction of her political and commercial life (4–20).
   (*c*) The destruction of her social life (21–24).

G. The Triumph of the Church (xix. 1–10).

1. The bride of Christ (1–10).
2. The conquering Word of God (11–16).
3. The defeat and destruction of the Church's enemies (17–21).

IV. A FORECAST OF HISTORY AFTER THE VICTORY OVER CÆSAR-WORSHIP.

I. The Millennium—the Gains of Victory (xx. 1–6).
   (*a*) Negative aspect—the binding of Satan (1–3).
   (*b*) Positive aspect—the reign of the saints (4–6).

II. The After-struggles of History, the Exhaustion of Evil (7–10).

V. THE GENERAL JUDGMENT (xx. 11–15).

VI. LIFE MADE PERFECT (xxi.–xxii. 5).

I. The new Heaven and the new Earth, the Holy City (xxi. 1–8).

II. A detailed View of the Life of the Holy City (9–xxii. 5).

VII. EPILOGUE ASSERTING THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE VISION AND THE IMMINENCE OF THE EVENTS IT DESCRIBES (xxii. 6*a*, 7*a*, 8*a*, 10–15, 21).

THE APOCALYPSE.

THE TITLE.

THE Book as it left the writer's hands would bear no title. It was only when it came to be read as Scripture in the congregation that the need of a distinguishing title would be felt. The R.V. retains the traditional title, '*The Revelation of S. John the Divine*'; but the oldest MSS. have the shorter form, 'The Revelation of John.'

John was called 'the Divine' or 'the Theologian,' as being the reputed author of the Fourth Gospel.

DESCRIPTIVE AND LITURGICAL INTRODUCTION.

Chap. i. 1–3. That these verses are *a descriptive and liturgical heading* from the point of view of a later age, the following arguments go to show. 1. The author is spoken of in ver. 1 in the third person, while in ver. 9 he himself speaks in the first person. 2. Ver. 4 is the natural opening of an Eastern letter. 3. The passage 1–2 might almost stand as the entry of the Book in a library catalogue. Ver. 3 is a liturgical touch which shows that the Book had already come to be read as Sacred Scripture at public worship. 4. The atmosphere of these verses is different from that which called forth the Book. The purpose of the writer was to stimulate to endure, and not to prove unfaithful to Christ in a pressing trial. But the crisis passed, and the Book came to be regarded as a prediction of the course of the history of the world, and especially of the method of its final consummation. 5. Ver. 2 would sound most natural if the author was already dead, and a new generation had arisen which knew him not.

Yet the verses must have been added early enough for the expectation of the speedy coming of Christ to Judgment to be still a living faith in the Church.

In these opening verses, then, the Book is conceived as a revelation of eschatological events, given by God to Christ, and by Christ to an angel, and by the angel to the prophet, and by the prophet to the Church. In this descending series of steps—God, Christ, angel, prophet, Church—we have perhaps a trace of Gnostic influence on the thought of the Church.

1. **Revelation** or *Apocalypse*. If the word is to be understood in its technical sense, it is a mark of the later origin of these introductory verses. The claim of the writer himself is that his Book is prophetic. The R.V. puts the comma after **servants**, and treats the phrase, **the things which must shortly come to pass**, as in apposition to revelation. **The Revelation of Jesus Christ, . . . even the things which must shortly come to pass. of Jesus Christ**, *i.e.*, given by Jesus Christ, as the next clause shows. So Paul in Gal. i. 12. In 1 Cor. i. 7, etc., the revelation of Jesus Christ means the *parousia* or second coming, in which Christ is not the Revealer but the Revealed.

which God gave him. This is a Johannine note. The Evangelist that gives Christ the highest place in relation to God asserts most strongly that all that He gives to man He first received from God (John xii. 49). This dependence does not imply inferiority of nature, but special function. **His servants**, *i.e.* God's. **Must** means 'according to the Divine ordering of events.' **shortly** here points to the expectation of the speedy coming of Christ to Judgment. **He sent and signified**, literally, 'having sent He signified.' Sent in the original is the word from which 'apostle' is derived. His angel became His Apostle.

2. **who bare witness** here means 'testifying by writing.' In the original letter it means 'suffering martyrdom.' **word of God**, *i.e.*, the revelation that God had given and that Christ had borne witness to. *and of all things*, R.V. **even of all things.**

3. **Blessed.** It has been pointed out that this is the first of

a series of seven beatitudes that occur throughout the Book. These have been taken as evidence that it is built up on a system of sevens. But if the introduction was added by another than the original author, this beatitude must stand in a different position from the others. It is a prayer rather than a promise—'blessed be' rather than 'blessed is.' **he that readeth** means the member of the congregation who was deputed to read the lessons at public worship. Probably at this early time there was no single official who had this duty, but all who were able would undertake it in turn.

If this introduction were from the hand of the writer of the Book, it would show that he intended that his writing should be read as Sacred Scripture in the church. But even in those cases where reading publicly is mentioned (Col. iv. 16; 1 Thess. v. 27) the N.T. writers probably never contemplated any such thing. Most of the Epistles of the N.T. were written to meet some need, and of course their authors would wish them to become as well known as possible in the church to which they were primarily sent. But after they had served their immediate purpose, they were treasured and copied and circulated and read at public worship because of their power to exhort and console. Such we may suppose was the history of the Book of Revelation in the Church. It was written to meet a definite crisis. But it won a permanent place in the canon partly because of 'its religious faith and feeling,' partly also because, having come to be looked upon as apostolic, it seemed to give an authoritative answer to those problems of the future which exercise so strong a fascination over the human mind. **they that hear**, the congregation. **and keep**, etc. There is no second article before *keep*. Hearing and keeping both make up the single character upon which God's blessing comes (cf. John xiii. 17).

Prologue.

4–20. The Introduction Proper, narrating the circumstances under which John was called to be a prophet of Christ

and the vision of the Risen Lord which gave him his commission and served to authenticate his message.

4. **John to the seven churches.** An eastern letter began with the writer's name (cf. Paul's Epistles), sometimes accompanied by some designation by which his readers could identify him, or which might give force to his words (cf. Gal. i. 1). Then followed the name of the party for whom the letter was intended, together with some words of greeting. In this letter nothing is added to designate the writer, probably because he was too well known to need any distinguishing epithet, and because he relied on a personal rather than an official authority. **the seven churches which are in Asia.** By Asia is undoubtedly meant the province of that name, consisting of the dominions which Attalus III., king of Pergamum, bequeathed to the Romans, in 133 B.C., with some additions. In the first century it comprised Mysia, Caria, Lydia, part of Phrygia, and some of the islands.

Seven churches. This does not mean that there were only seven towns in the province of Asia in which there were Christian communities at the close of the first century. We know of churches in Troas, Hierapolis, Colossæ, etc. Nor does it necessarily mean that those mentioned were the largest, or planted in the towns of greatest importance. Throughout the Book the number seven is symbolic, expressing completeness. The *seven churches* means the Church in its totality.

The Greeting.

Grace to you, and peace. This Christian greeting combines the Greek 'gladness,' 'joy,' and the Hebrew 'peace,' and at the same time gives them a richer content. In Christ the common things of life are caught up to a higher level and are endowed with a new consecration. The Greek 'gladness' becomes the 'grace of God,' which is the root of all true gladness; and the Hebrew 'peace' becomes 'the peace of Christ, which passeth all understanding.' **from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come.** In this majestic combination of phrases we have a circumlocution

for Jehovah, the 'I AM,' the eternally existing. It corresponds to 'from God the Father' so frequently used by Paul. *He is*, in a sense in which no other can be. While all the beings that play their part in the world pass away, He continues. *He was*, in that His hand has guided the course of all past history. *He is to come* or 'cometh,' in that all History is working out His purpose (see on ver. 7). It comforted the Christians to be reminded of this, that God, the everliving One, is not ignorant or unheeding of their conflict and sufferings. **from the seven spirits which are before His throne.** In harmony with the symbolic meaning of the number seven, this would mean the all-pervasive Spirit of God and of Christ (iii. 1). The origin of this conception of the Spirit as sevenfold has been traced to such passages as Zech. iii. 9, iv. 10; Isa. xi. 2; as well as such passages from Jewish apocalypses as Tob. xii. 15. More important than the origin of the conception is the suggestion that is here intended to be conveyed, that all the energies of God are working out grace and peace for His suffering people. **which are before His throne**, *i.e.*, rendering worship, and ever ready to go forth at His bidding.

5. **from Jesus Christ.** The Second Person in the Trinity is here placed third for emphasis, because it is Jesus Christ that is to occupy the chief place in the Book. The third 'and' has almost the force of 'and most of all.' **the faithful witness.** Christ is pre-eminently what the writer would like his readers to be. The whole burden of the Book may be summed up as the bringing of the force of Christ to the help of human life in a time of stress. *first begotten of the dead.* R.V. firstborn; cf. 1 Cor. xv. 20; Col. i. 18. The thought of the writer may be glancing at the fear that held so large a place at this time, that Nero was to return from the dead. But Christ had risen, giving them the proof that to the witness death is the gate of life. **the *Prince* (ruler) of the kings of the earth.** Christ rules over the destinies of nations and the hearts of kings; and one day that rule shall be made manifest (xix. 16). *Unto Him that loved us.*

This is the first of a series of ascriptions of praise to God and to Christ. Praise is the undertone of the whole Book. The very mention of the names of God and of Christ was enough to liberate in the hearts of the early Christians fountains of devotion that overflowed in streams of praise. The changes that the R.V. has adopted should be noted: **loveth** for *loved*, **loosed** for *washed*, **a kingdom** for *kings*, **His God and Father** for *God and His Father*, with some smaller changes. **loveth.** Christ's love is the source of salvation. The present tense brings out its unchanging character. **loosed.** The past tense denotes a finished act. This may be either the historic act of Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross, or the appropriation of His forgiveness in the experience of His followers. In either case they could say, 'It's done, the great transaction's done.'

6. The deliverance from sin means the introduction into a position of glorious privilege. **and He made . . . Father.** WH. puts this in parenthesis, resuming the former clause with '**to Him be the glory.**' *kings.* R.V. **a kingdom**; '*to be* a kingdom, *to be* priests' (v. 10). Christ hath made them a kingdom with the obligation to obedience lying upon them. It is thus an appeal to their loyalty to God. The charge of disloyalty to the emperor was being constantly hurled at them. But they are reminded that 'there is another King, One Jesus.' But they are made priests also. This may be intended to suggest the privilege in which those stood who had the right of access to God. The high-priesthood of the imperial cultus was a keenly sought honour. But when we consider the circumstances of those to whom John was writing, it may be legitimate for us to see here the idea that just because they are priests, their sufferings have the significance of a sacrifice. 'Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices' (Heb. viii. 3); wherefore it was necessary that they also have something to offer. 'A kingdom and priests' therefore implies loyalty and sacrifice. *unto God and His Father* should probably be '**His God and Father.**' **to Him be the glory and the dominion.** The insertion

of the article even in English gives a stateliness to the language that conveys the suggestion of the pre-eminence of the place ascribed to Christ. The Christians of Asia are summoned to rise to the level of giving the highest place to Him for whom they were enduring the loss of all things and even of life itself.

7. This verse may be regarded as an epitome of the whole Book, whose burden is the promise of the coming of Christ before the eyes of men, and of His ultimate triumph over all opposing forces.

He cometh, does not necessarily imply a bodily coming, but the triumph of His Church over the enemies that were seeking to destroy it. 'Any signal interposition on behalf of His Church, or in the destruction of His enemies, may be metaphorically called a coming of Christ.'[1] *clouds.* R.V. **the clouds.** The clouds of coming distress overhung; but the tribulations that they had to endure were the footprints of Christ. Hebrew literature regarded the clouds as inseparable from a manifestation of God (Dan. vii. 13). **every eye shall see Him.** Those who were unable to recognise His glory in the day of the weakness of His Cause will have to acknowledge and confess Him when they see it triumphant. **they which pierced Him,** *sc.* shall see Him. The relative pronoun has the force of 'such as they who,' thus widening the reference from those who actually crucified Christ to those who follow in their footsteps and crucify Him afresh. The piercing is taken as representative of the Crucifixion. It was an act that showed peculiar blindness to the Divine strength and tenderness that were in Jesus. Even through their blindness shall His glory strike. There is an obvious reference here, as in John xix. 37, to Zech. xii. 10: 'And again, another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.' While the Greek word equivalent to the Hebrew meaning 'pierced' occurs here and in the Gospel, the LXX. in Zechariah employs a word which means 'insulted.' This passage, then, in common with the Fourth Gospel, is in agreement with the Hebrew against the

[1] Archbishop Newcome.

LXX. And this has been used as an argument that both these books come from the same hand. But, on the other hand, when we examine the three passages we find that they all differ from each other very materially. The saying in Zechariah speaks of a time of returning to God; in the Fourth Gospel, of the fulfilment of a prophecy; here, of the Coming of Christ in Judgment. In the prophet *see* means 'look towards in penitence and hope'; in the Gospel, 'look upon as a spectacle'; here, 'look upon in terror.' In Zechariah *mourn over* implies grief on account of loss (cf. as for an only son; here it means anguish through terror of.

These variations in the use of an O.T. passage show: 1. With what freedom the N.T. writers used the O.T. 2. How persecution hardened the attitude of the Church towards the world. That the tender promise of the prophet should in the Christian Book be transformed into a threat in connection with the coming of Christ, indicates one of the outstanding limitations of the Book of Revelation. In the Apocalypse we have the promise of triumph for the Church of Christ, but we miss the tenderness of Christian solicitude for the souls of men. The study of other periods of Church History during which persecution prevailed shows that almost inevitably persecution introduces hardness into the thinking, and even into the heart. All *kindreds* or **tribes.** This phrase summarises Zech. xii. 12–14. **Even so, Amen.** Nai, Amen. The Greek and Hebrew formulæ of affirmation are combined. Cf. Abba, Father (Mark xiv. 36).

Not only are devotion and gratitude awakened to keep the Christians true to Christ, but the terror of judgment is also employed to hinder them from apostasy.

8. **I am Alpha and Omega.** The words *the beginning and the ending* are to be omitted in this passage, and the article is to be inserted before A and O. Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. With the article they imply that God is the absolute beginning from which all things issue, and the absolute end towards which all things move. The

intermediate letters represent the transient dualism of history. As the Alpha and the Omega, God is all-embracing, the mere assertion of which suggests His sufficiency to give men the help that they need. *saith the Lord.* R.V. **the Lord God.** Marg. *The Lord the God.* **the Almighty.** The word so translated is used in the LXX. as the translation of the Hebrew phrase, 'The Lord of Hosts.'

The Experience in the Writer's Life that gave rise to the Letter.

A vision of the Risen Lord (9–20). A theophany or manifestation of God often (see especially Isa. vi. and Ezek. i. and ii.) appears as the introduction to a prophetic career in the O.T. So the mission of this N.T. prophet is inaugurated by a vision of the Risen Christ.

The outward and inward circumstances of the writer (9, 10).

9. *I John, who also am.* More simply in R.V. **I John, your brother.** The claim that he makes upon their faith rests on the fact that the situation with which he is dealing is common to him and them. He is one with them in suffering, and is able to bring comfort to them through what gave strength to himself. *companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience,* R.V. **partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus.** Tribulation, kingdom, patience. The peculiar use of the article (cf. R.V. with A.V.) suggests that these three words are to be taken together as making up a single idea. Tribulation, kingdom, patience are the background of faith in Christ such as His followers were called upon to show. The order, too, seems significant. The first term represents their present position; the second, the goal of the soul's endeavour, the kingdom of Jesus; the third, the way from the one to the other, endurance of what the world offers.

in Jesus. A common Pauline idea. The fundamental form of it is found in Rom. xvi. 7, 'were in Christ before me.' The

spiritual condition of union to Christ is conceived under the figure of a local habitation, within which the whole life was lived and from which all its activities received their distinctive characteristic. Perhaps the passage of Paul that comes nearest to the present is Phil. i. 13: 'So that my bonds became manifest in Christ'; 'the in-Christness' of my bonds became manifest.

But Paul always employs the form 'in Christ,' never 'in Jesus.' And this difference corresponds in both cases to the point of view of the writer. It was the mission of Paul to declare that the Jesus who had been crucified on earth was the glorified Christ working out all good to His Church through His risen life; while the message of John was that He who will one day be acknowledged King of kings, is the Jesus who was crucified and slain.

It does not follow that John derived the idea through Paul. Both it and the corresponding idea 'Christ in us' have a close analogy in the words of Our Lord: 'Even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in us' (John xvii. 21). **was in the isle,**—*i.e.* came to be in the purpose of God. **Patmos** is the modern Patino, a small island in the Sporades group in the Ægean, not far from the coast of Asia Minor. There is no evidence apart from this passage that it was ever used as a place of banishment, but there is no reason for not taking John as a trustworthy witness on the point. An early tradition says that John was sent to work in the mines, *i.e.* the marble quarries, in the fourteenth year of the reign of Domitian (95 A.D.), and that he was released under Nerva. **for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus.** These words might mean—(1) for the purpose of receiving this vision; (2) for the purpose of preaching the word: (3) suffering for the word. In view of early tradition and the whole tenor of the Book the last is the most probable.

10. His outward condition was wretched enough. But the spiritual triumphs over the outward. The Lord's Day comes to him, not perhaps with cessation from toil, but with memories and thoughts so uplifting that he is caught up in the Spirit, and

his outward situation becomes dim in the contemplation of spiritual things. **was in the Spirit.**

> 'And God's own profound
> Was above me, and round me the mountains,
> And under, the sea,
> And within me my heart to bear witness
> What was and shall be!'[1]

That this was a real spiritual experience is shown by the fact that in it he himself derived the comfort that he seeks to give to his readers. But what did the experience mean? It does not carry us far to speak of it as an ecstasy. There remains the question, What is an ecstasy? In trying to analyse the experience there are three stages on which we may fix our attention. 1. A stage of intense meditation on the problems raised by the existing situation of the Church. 2. The flash of illumination, which brought his unconnected ideas into the unity of a world-scheme. The new idea that came to him was perhaps the conviction that Cæsar-worship was the historic counterpart of the enmity of Satan to God (see on xiii. 1). 3. It was natural that so great an 'access of divine light shed suddenly upon the soul' should take the form of a vision whose details would flow into the moulds of his habitual thought. **the Lord's Day** means the Christian Sabbath, and is, of course, altogether different from 'The Day of the Lord,' the Day of Judgment. This is the only instance in the N.T. of the use of what is so fitting and reverent a name for the day on which Jesus rose. What day was so likely to provoke the soul of John to such meditation as would lift him to a vision of victory through endurance of tribulation as the day on which Jesus rose from the dead? **heard behind me** brings out the unexpectedness of the vision. His face was not set towards it. The voice broke upon his ear. **as of a trumpet**, arresting his attention.

11. The first words spoken by the voice were a command to write. The vision is not seen by him and recorded as merely

[1] Browning, *The Englishman in Italy.*

interesting. It is of vital importance, and is given that it may be delivered to the Church. The practical purpose of the Book must never be lost sight of. The questions of importance are, 'How did John clothe his glowing faith in words so as to carry it into the hearts of his readers?' 'How would they so understand the words and imagery of the seer that his thoughts and faith and triumphant gladness would be reproduced in them?' If we look at the Book in any other way than as the straight line, the shortest distance, between the heart of the teacher and the hearts of his converts, we are on wrong lines of interpretation. It is the failure to recognise that here we have a message of 'kindling faith and glowing word' that has led many interpreters astray. Omit *I am Alpha and Omega . . . last*: also the clause *which are in Asia*. **What thou seest.** The revelation was not to be given through narrative with its deficiencies, but with the vividness of direct sight. **the seven churches.** See on ver. 4. The churches are mentioned in the order that a messenger from Patmos would naturally follow in traversing the province of Asia.

12. **I turned.** This is the seer's response to the voice. No one is ever merely passive to a revelation from God. The attention arrested must be given. **candlesticks**, R.V. marg. *lampstands*: but the familiar diction of the A.V. reconciles us to many a less accurate rendering. The image is probably suggested by the seven-branched candlestick of Zech. iv. 2. But the author does not allow himself to be hampered by his model. He modifies it to suit his purpose in a truly creative way. Here, for the seven-branched candlestick, we have seven separate lampstands, each representing a separate congregation, and tended and trimmed by the Lord Jesus Himself. The one idea common to Zechariah and John is that of light radiating out into the surrounding darkness from the worship of God. **golden.** The lampstands are golden, to indicate the value of the Church to the world. The combination **golden candlesticks** represents what Jesus expects His Church to be in the world, precious and light-bearing.

13. The priest moving about trimming the lamps would appear

to an onlooker to be walking among them. What a beautiful symbol of Christ's constant care for His Church this is. He is with His congregations, trimming their flickering light into a clear, steady flame. How encouraging would this thought of the unseen Helper be to those who feared that their light was about to be quenched!

The Vision of the Lord (13-16).

The features that go to make up this portrait are drawn from various O.T. personalities—the Son of Man (Dan. vii.), the Ancient of Days (Dan. vii.), the man clothed in linen (Dan. x.), the man with the ink-horn (Ezek. ix.). The various features are thus conventional, but the portrait as a whole is an original creation.

John intends to present such a conception of the Sender of the message as will carry conviction and endue with strength. Every feature is charged with spiritual significance.

13. **like unto a son of man.** He was human and yet transcended the human.

After the general impression *His garments* were the first feature to catch the eye of the seer. **clothed with a garment down to the foot.** The Greek word translated *a garment down to the foot* (Ezek. ix. 2, 11) means a robe of dignity, perhaps of priestly dignity. **girt about the breasts.** High girding indicated lofty position, and was usually reserved for Jewish priests (Moffatt).

14. After His dress came *His person.* **His head and . . . snow.** These features suggest venerableness, perhaps eternal existence. **His eyes were as a flame of fire,** able to penetrate into the secrets of the heart. In this symbol some have supposed that we have a memory of the searching glance of Jesus of Nazareth.

15. **feet like . . . furnace.** The word translated *burnished brass* is found only here and in ii. 18. Both its derivation and its meaning are uncertain. It evidently stands for some mixture of metal in a molten state, and consequently glowing with great brilliance. 'The original portrait in Daniel is of a messenger whose feet would be swift and unwearied' (Anderson Scott).

Feet of brass would suggest strength, stability. **His voice . . . waters.** Majesty, authority, are suggested by this simile. It was a natural simile to one in whose ears was the roar of the Ægean.

16. **And He had . . . stars,** *i.e.* a garland of stars. The idea of a garland may have been suggested by the circular route on which the cities lay. Here the image of ver. 13 is carried farther. It is still the churches that are in view, but the churches in their ideal purity and strength of influence (see on ver. 20). **out of His mouth . . . sword** (xix. 15). This is an example of what we find over and over again in the Book, that the consistency and credibility of the visual image is sacrificed to the spiritual meaning. The two-edged sword proceeding from the mouth suggests the penetration of the Divine word. The weapons of the Church are spiritual—an everlasting gospel. Not by outward and material force, but by the proclamation of the truth does it gain its victories. The short Roman sword was in shape not unlike a tongue. **His countenance . . . strength** (x. 1). Countenance or visage. Some have seen a reminiscence of the Transfiguration here.

17. The immediate effect of the vision on the seer was that fear (cf. **Fear not**) smote him to the ground as one dead. **Fear not** (Dan. x. 12; Mark vi. 50). Before revelation is possible fear must be turned to faith. So to Ezekiel in his abasement came the word, 'Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak with thee' (Ezek. ii. 1).

The Lord's Description of Himself.

I am the first and the last. Similar words are spoken of Jehovah in Isa. xli. 4. That words applied to Jehovah in the O.T. should have been applied by Christians to Jesus without any sense of incongruity is evidence of the supreme place that was given to Him in the faith and thought of the Early Church.

The differences in translation between the A.V. and the R.V.

are specially worth noting in this verse. *I am the first and the last, and the Living one*, corresponds in idea though not in order to 'which is, and which was, and which is to come.' WH. puts *and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore* in parenthesis, thus bringing *and I have the keys of death and of Hades* into close connection with *I am the first and the last, and the Living one*.

18. **and the Living one.** Christ is the possessor of Life in Himself (John v. 26). **and I was dead.** Literally, 'I became dead.' Life was His inherent possession; death was an incident in His experience. **I am alive.** Life enriched with all the gains of death. It is life upon which death shall not again lay its hand, so that in the darkest night of persecution Christ's followers may be sure that He lives. **for evermore.** Literally, 'Unto the ages of the ages.' *Amen* is to be omitted. **and I have. . . . Hades.** As the first and the last, and the Living one, the Lord of life and of death, He has authority over their kingdoms, opening their gates to whom He will. Hades, O.T. Sheol, the place of the departed.

19. **Write therefore.** The command of ver. 11 is repeated and emphasised by the revelation of the ascended Lord. 'Write on My authority that, because I am what I am, thy visions shall not fail.' *hast seen*, rather **sawest**, *i.e.* the vision of Christ. **The things which are** represent contemporary events. **The things which shall come to pass hereafter** are the issues of contemporary events.

20. **the mystery.** This must be either the object of write, or, more probably, an accusative of reference—'as touching the mystery.' The word mystery has two meanings in the N.T. 1. 'A truth once hidden, but now revealed' (chiefly in Paul). 2. A symbol (here and in xvii. 7). **the seven stars which thou sawest in My right hand.** Here the preposition is 'upon,' and would suggest that the stars are lying in the open palm. The important point is that Christ holds them and cares for them. **the angels of the seven churches.** Two interpretations of this symbol have

been given. 1. The bishops or chief pastors of the churches, as in the well-known hymn :

> 'Saviour, as stars in Thy right hand
> The angels of the churches be.'

2. Superhuman beings standing in intimate relation to the churches as their guardians. This interpretation probably belongs to the system of thought that maintains a descending series of mediators between God and man and Nature.

Both of these interpretations are now generally set aside in favour of another, that the angels of the churches are the ideals of the churches, their heavenly counterparts, the churches as Christ sees them, and as they are in His hand, the 'personification of their spirit or an ideal representation of their personality' (Anderson Scott). **the seven candlesticks.** See on ver. 12. The church as it actually is, is a candlestick; the church as Christ sees it, is a star. So every congregation, in so far as it is pursuing its ideal, is rising from being a candlestick to become a star, freighted with far-reaching light.

The Messages to the Individual Churches.

These messages disclose an intimate knowledge not only of the situation of the churches, but also of the history and traditions of the cities. They suggest that the characteristics of the city life have been carried into the church life and are repeating themselves in similar results. The dominating thought of the messages is that the churches must be purified from the evils within them so that they may be able to play a noble part in a struggle that is impending. The general plan of the letters is as follows: 1. A description of the Sender, generally recalling some feature from the portrait of Christ in the first chapter. The feature chosen in each case is that most suited to the circumstances of the particular church. To encourage the churches to endure, the writer sets forth Christ as the perfect

embodiment of all in which they are more or less lacking. 2. An assertion of Christ's knowledge of their circumstances, followed by words of commendation or blame, together with such exhortations and threatenings as the situation demanded. 3. A special promise as the reward of victory, which is so suited to the circumstances of each church as to constitute a strong inducement to it to live so as to realise it. 4. A general exhortation to all hearers, placed sometimes before, sometimes after, the promise, with the aim of emphasising the importance of the message.

I. The Message to the Church in Ephesus: 'The City of Change'[1] (ii. 1–7).

For Ephesus, see art. in Hastings' *Dict. of the Bible*. It is mentioned first because a messenger from Patmos to Asia would land there. Ephesus is distant from Patmos about 60 miles.

Chap. ii. 1. **To the angel**, *i.e.* to the ideal church as Christ sees it (see on i. 20). It is to the better self of a church as of an individual that the most hopeful appeal is always made. **He that holdeth**, a stronger word than is used in i. 16. Perhaps the change is deliberate, to encourage the church against which the Lord had to bring the charge that it was in danger of slipping from His grasp. They had every reason to be steadfast, since Christ had hold of them.

2. **I know.** What could bring a more powerful stimulus to fainting men than the thought that their conflict was intimately known to Christ, with all that that implied? **thy works.** This term is here used in the sense of the general course of life, further specified in the case of Ephesus as active resistance of evil and passive endurance of persecution. The active resistance of evil is further explained (ver. 2) as the endeavour to get rid of evil men and the careful testing of the claims of professing

[1] The titles are from Ramsay, *The Seven Churches*.

teachers; their passive endurance (ver. 3), as suffering without weariness for His name's sake. These were just the qualities needed by a church endeavouring to keep its footing in the midst of triumphant heathenism, and open to the advent of teachers from every side. **that thou canst not bear evil men.** 'That thou canst not so much as tolerate' (Moffatt). This is repeated more specifically in ver. 6: 'Thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitans.' *thou hast tried*, R.V. **didst try**, the claims of some to bring them a Divine message. (See note on *didst find*.) *hast found*, R.V. **didst find**. The past tenses in all the letters should receive their full force. They suggest that the writer is referring to events that were isolated and recent. It would not have been a matter for so great congratulation if the Ephesians had been able to try and reject false teachers while he was with them to guide them; but that, deprived of his guidance, they should have acquitted themselves so well, was matter for joy indeed. *liars*, R.V. **false**. They failed to stand the test in regard to the truth of their teaching, and, consequently, in regard to their claim to be apostles of God.

The time of testing had proved a critical time in the church. Had they yielded to the teaching of the so-called apostles, life would have been easier for them. Their resistance to that teaching entailed the suffering of hardship.

3. **thou hast patience.** The present tense indicates that this was a permanent characteristic of their lives. *hast borne*, R.V. **didst bear**. See note in ver. 2, 'didst find.' *hast laboured* is to be omitted. *hast not fainted*, R.V. **hast not grown weary.** The power of going on in a hard path belonged to Ephesus. They had come through much, and were prepared to face more.

4. This high commendation is not unqualified. Admiration for their brave fight did not blind the Lord to the signs of slackening zeal.

hast left, R.V. **didst leave**. Here again the tense of the verb suggests that in some trial they had shown less than their usual zeal. Perhaps they had contented themselves with taking a

milder course with the false teachers than they had first resolved upon, as is suggested by *first works*, ver. 5, or had done something that had enabled them to escape the extremity of persecution. The mildness of the language of this Epistle compared with that used with regard to the lapses of other churches suggests that the writer does not accuse the Ephesians of a permanent condition of gradually cooling zeal. He can touch upon their fault lightly just because it was a single lapse from the highest, probably already repented of.

> 'The sin that practice burns into the blood,
> And not the one dark hour that brings remorse,
> Will brand us, after, of whose fold we be.'[1]

5. But slight though the lapse was, it was dangerous. It was the first step on a downward road. And if the evil was to be undone the step must be retraced. Memory, repentance, faithfulness were the successive steps by which they could regain their place. *I will come*, R.V. I come, or am coming. This coming of Christ was not the result of their unfaithfulness. He is always coming to His Church, to try it, and approve or condemn it. The meaning is, 'When I come to thee, I will remove.' **to thee** or 'for thee.' The original is a dative which means, 'for thy advantage or disadvantage, as the case may be.' *quickly* is to be omitted. **will move.** Professor Ramsay thinks that there is here a reference to the changes that took place from time to time in the site of the city, and explains it as a threat of another change. But the meaning seems to be deeper. Life and influence are not permanently possible on any level beneath the highest. **except thou repent.** This phrase, closing the verse like a lingering strain of music, suggests to them that the threat is not absolute, that the door of mercy is still open.

6. The Lord does not end His estimate of the church's condition on the note of condemnation. What meets His approval outweighs what evokes His rebuke ; and praise even more than

[1] Tennyson, *Merlin and Vivien*,

blame is a stimulus to faithfulness. So the last word is one of commendation, and takes away any harshness that is in the threat.

thou hatest. A hatred of evil is the reverse side of the love of good.

the works of the Nicolaitans. It is to be inferred from the use of the term *works* that it was some form of antinomianism that was threatening the church. **Nicolaitans.** This sect, which in the N.T. is mentioned only here and in ii. 15, was from early times supposed to derive its name and its doctrines from Nicolas, one of the deacons (Acts vi. 5). What its tenets were it is impossible to say with certainty; but early writers accuse its members of gross antinomian practices. It is doubtful, however, whether their statements are derived from independent sources, or are merely the elaboration of this passage.

In the letters their presence is noted only in Ephesus and Pergamum, and this fact suggests inquiry whether in these two cities there were conditions that explain why this sect is singled out for special mention by the writer as the object of his hatred. Now, we know that the imperial cultus against which this Book is launched would be specially strong in these two cities. There would, therefore, not unnaturally arise a party in these churches which would defend the purchasing of relief with a little compromise. We can understand how one who possessed the uncompromising temper of the writer could speak in such strong language even of fellow-Christians. In a crisis such as the Church was passing through it must be all or nothing. And he would look upon those who recommended any concession as traitors to the name of Christ, all the more that they firmly claimed the right to bear it. It is almost certain that this sect is different from the false apostles mentioned in ver. 2. It is the teaching of the one and the practice of the other that are condemned. From the fact that the mention of the Nicolaitans is relegated almost to a postscript in this letter, it is probable that their works were not much in evidence at Ephesus. The attitude of that church towards all gross sins and all worldly compromise was well known, and it was sound.

7. **He that hath an ear.** The purpose of this formula is to call attention to the threats and promises of the Lord. But it also serves to widen their application. It is as if He said, 'What I say regarding Ephesus is true of every church of any time that is in the position of Ephesus.' **the Spirit.** The writer claims for his messages the highest authority. They are the utterances of the Spirit of God. **To him that overcometh.** The word 'overcome' is a key-word of the Book. It is a book of conflict, an epic of battle. The singular suggests that the victory of the Church is made up of the victory of her individual members.

As in the greeting of each letter there is a reference back to the portrait of Christ, so in the final promise there is a reference forward to the end of all things, the New Jerusalem. The ideal life as it was realised in Jesus, and the ideal life as it is to be realised with Jesus, are alike encouragements to faithfulness.

to eat of the tree of life. The promise of immortal life corresponds to the threat of the candlestick removed, life quenched and influence destroyed. *in the midst of.* Omit *midst of.* **Paradise.** Paradise is a word of Persian origin, and meant originally a royal park or enclosure. Its use here is suggested to some extent by the Garden of Eden in which also was the tree of life (Gen. ii. 9). The first mention of the tree of life in a vision of the celestial Paradise is in the Book of Enoch xxiv. **God.** Some MSS. have the reading 'my God' (cf. iii. 12). The addition of the pronoun seems to give stronger guarantee of the fulfilment of the promise.

The Message to the Church in Smyrna: 'The City of Life' (ii. 8–11).

From Ephesus the messenger would proceed in a north-westerly direction for about thirty-five miles along the road that connected the towns on the western seaboard of Asia Minor, and would reach Smyrna. (For Smyrna, see art. in Hastings' *D.B.*)

8. **the first and the last.** The message is appropriately sent as

from Him who is the First and the Last, who was dead and lived, in view of the history of Smyrna, and of the tribulations that the church had already suffered and was still to suffer. **was dead**, R.V. marg. *became dead*, accepted death as an experience, though it was not natural to Him. See on 'I am the Living One,' i. 18.) *and is alive*, R.V. **and lived again.** The translation *and is alive* in the A.V. is incorrect, and in the R.V. the true meaning is obscured by the addition of the word *again*, as if the reference were to the resurrection of Jesus. The real meaning is much richer. In Christ life reached its fulness through death. The Cross was not the extinction of life, but the means by which it was completed. 'He that loseth his life shall find it' expresses a law of life to which even the Son of God was no exception. Many have found the secret of Christianity in the phrase 'Die to live.' A similar expression is used with reference to the anti-christ in xiii. 14. It was fitting to remind a church which was suffering persecution, that through death it was realising fuller life. It was inspiring for it to know that the road along which it was called upon to travel was the road by which Christ Himself attained to His glory. Professor Ramsay sees in this verse a reference to the persistence of the life of Smyrna under the Lydian monarchy, and also to the sufferings it had endured as the ally of the Romans, which had indeed proved the secret of its life. (See Hastings' *D.B.*)

9. *I know thy works, and.* Omit *thy works, and.* **tribulation.** The pride of the city in the imperial cultus would make the church's position all the harder. Life there would be like passing under the *tribulum* or threshing-sledge. **poverty.** Was it true of Smyrna as of Corinth that 'not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble,' had been called (1 Cor. i. 26)? Or perhaps poverty was the result of persecution (cf. Heb. x. 34). **but thou art rich.** This assertion of riches amid outward poverty is analogous to the assertion of spiritual life in apparent death. Contrast what is said of Laodicea (iii. 17). **blasphemy** or reviling of, coarse slander that comes from the mouth of. (On

Jews in Smyrna, see Hastings' *D.B.*) **And they are not.** They were Jews by birth, but they had forfeited the standing of Jews (cf. Rom. ii. 28 f.). **synagogue of Satan.** There may be a reference here to some combined effort on the part of the Jews against the Christians. 'The reviling of those who say they are Jews' would seem to denote the kind of persecution that the Epistle to the Hebrews was written to meet; while the letter also points to the existence of the more material and brutal persecution inflicted by the Roman Empire. Thus the situation of this devoted church was peculiarly trying.

10. *Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer*, R.V. **Fear not the things which thou art about to suffer.** The tribulation is certain and imminent. *shall cast* should be **is about to cast. behold, the devil.** The persecution that came from the hands of man was in reality the work of Satan. Behind all human hostility to the Church there was a power hostile to God and using man as its instrument (see especially chap. xii. ff.). **that ye may be tried.** Satan tries men with a view to their downfall; God tries with a view to their standing and victory. **ye shall have.** Another reading is *(that) ye may have*. **ten days.** It was an element of the encouragement that John had to offer them that the tribulation would be for a definite and limited season. If it would be sharp, it would be short. **Be thou,** rather, 'prove thyself.' **faithful unto death.** The phrase may have a fuller suggestiveness from the history of the city. *a crown*, R.V. **the crown of life.** The word here rendered crown means the garland of victory. The brows of the faithful would be garlanded with life. Smyrna was famous for its games, in which the prize was a garland. 'Crown' seems to have been a metaphor frequently employed in speech in connection with Smyrna.

11. **the second death,** the final destruction of all that is hostile to God. The Saviour in His message to this church paints the immediate future in sombre colours. Nothing was to be gained by concealing the coming tribulation. He would not that they should be taken by surprise. The true way to stimulate man-

hood is not to hide the truth, but so to infuse courage and endurance that men shall be able to accept whatever lot or task God sets before them.

The Message to the Church in Pergamum: 'The Royal City,' 'the City of Authority' (ii. 12–17).

The messenger would travel northward from Smyrna along the great coast road for about 55 miles, and would reach Pergamum. (For Pergamum, see art. in Hastings' *D.B.*)

12. **He that hath the sharp sword.** This feature of the portrait of Christ (i. 16) seems to have a double fitness at the head of this letter. It is suitable from the fact that Pergamum was still the official capital of the province and the residence of the Roman governor, the only man within its bounds who had the power of life and death. To Pergamum the Christians would be brought to be tried. The writer, then, gives to the Pergamene Christians the assurance that the sovereignty of Christ is above that of Rome. But the aspect in which Christ addresses the church in Pergamum is suitable also in view of the existence of grave evils within it, which called for such a sharp sword as would excise them from its life.

13. *thy works, and*, in the A.V. is to be omitted. **I know where thou dwellest.** It was the site of this church that constituted the grave element of the struggle which it had to undergo. **where Satan's *seat* is**, R.V. **throne.** In this phrase we have an anticipation of some of the ideas and imagery that occur over and over again throughout the Book. Pergamum was the very centre of Cæsar-worship in the province. Here, as at Ephesus, therefore, the temptation would be very strong to seek relief from the pressure of persecution by such a measure of conformity to the established religion as would content the authorities. **thou holdest fast My name.** Thou graspest it tight in spite of every inducement to let it go. The Pergamene Church was on the whole faithful to Christ. *hast not denied*, R.V. **didst not deny.**

The tense of the verb points to a special crisis of persecution (cf. vers. 2, 4) which may have been recent. On the whole, however, the form of the expression, 'in the days of Antipas,' would suggest that some time had already elapsed since then. **My faith,** *i.e.* thy faith in Me. **Antipas.** Nothing other than what is told here is known about this early martyr. He was probably the first to suffer under the State policy. One can easily imagine the effect upon the Christians of Pergamum when they realised that the State was prepared to go the length of inflicting death upon those who refused to obey. The writer counteracts this effect by representing how Christ gives to Antipas His own glorious name, *My witness, My faithful one* (cf. i. 5, 'the faithful witness'). **who was killed among you.** In later times the demands of the Roman populace for brutal amusement made Rome the place to which condemned Christians were sent. Ignatius says in his letter to the church of Ephesus: 'Ye are a high-way of them that are on their way to die unto God.' Ephesus was the port at which Christians of Asia would be embarked for the capital. **where Satan dwelleth.** The effect of this repetition of a leading idea in somewhat different language is to emphasise it.

There can hardly be any doubt that both the followers of Balaam and the Nicolaitans were members of the church. Further, the tone of the letter would seem to indicate that they were regarded with a measure of toleration (cf. *thou hast* with *thou hatest*, ver. 6). Hence while the attitude of the church of Ephesus to the Nicolaitans is praised, it is for her attitude towards this and similar sects that the church of Pergamum is blamed.

I have a few things against thee. Severe as was the trial to which the Pergamene church was subjected, it had not so failed as to bring down a severe rebuke upon it. **thou hast there them that hold.** They would seem to have been few, and, as yet at least, not able to exercise any great influence upon the policy of the church. *them* **that hold,** R.V. **some,** put in contrast to 'thou

holdest fast My name.' The Greek verb is the same in both cases. **to eat things sacrificed . . . fornication.** Were these practices taught by Christians in Pergamum? or are the words not to be looked upon as conventional symbols for idolatry? An attempt to answer the question, Who were the followers of Balaam? may help to clear up the matter.

In Rom. xiv. and 1 Cor. x., Paul asserts strongly the right of Christian liberty; but he asserts no less strongly the duty of so using that liberty as not to put a stumbling-block in the way of weaker brethren (Rom. xiv. 13).

On two points the question of liberty might arise in Asia in the first century. 1. The meat that was sold in the open market had first been offered in some heathen temple. Was it right for a Christian to buy it? 2. Social and industrial unity was promoted by means of public guild-feasts, which were often scenes of debauchery and licentiousness. Was it right for a Christian to attend them? This question really amounted to whether a Christian could share in the trade or mingle in the life of his city. In comparing John's position with Paul's we should remember— 1. The sharper antagonism that had grown up between the Church and the Empire. Paul had been able to regard the Empire as in a sense an ally. But John looked upon it as the Church's implacable enemy. The one or the other must go down. 2. A difference in temperament between Paul and the writer of this Book has to be taken into consideration. The writer of the Apocalypse strikes us as a man of more austere temper than Paul. What to Paul would be a matter of expediency, would appear to the other in the light of a sacred principle. At all times we are familiar with good men who hold different attitudes to such things as the theatre, dancing, etc. 3. We must look upon ver. 14 as containing the writer's estimate, not their own, of what the teaching and practices of the party amounted to. It is almost impossible to conceive that at this time men calling themselves Christians would deliberately adopt the plan of Balaam to lead their brethren into gross sin. Those who have been described as

holding the teaching of Balaam, then, may have been a party in the Pergamene church, who were inclined, perhaps a little selfishly, to use their liberty without due regard for their brethren's consciences. 'We become Balaams when our influence lowers the tone of any who are about us' (Christina Rossetti).

15. *which thing I hate* is to be omitted. **So hast thou them also.** Some identify the followers of Balaam with the Nicolaitans, but the form of the expression seems to point to them as a distinct party.

16. **Repent.** The exhortation to repentance is addressed to the whole church. Of what are they to repent? Of their toleration of the lax teaching and practices of the parties. There is perhaps, too, the subtle suggestion that the church is not wholly blameless for the existence of such teaching and practices in her midst. A warmer spiritual atmosphere would have rendered their presence impossible.

'The sinner's own fault? So it was.
. . . . . .
Clearly his own fault. Yet I think
My fault in part, who did not pray,
But lagged and would not lead the way.
I, haply, proved his missing link.
God help us both to mend and pray.'

I will come, R.V. **I come.** See on ver. 6. **to thee.** Here, as in ver. 5, the Greek is a dative, which we may call a dative of advantage. It was to the interest of those who were true that God should wage war with the false. *will fight against them*, R.V. **will make war with them . . . mouth** (xix. 15). The weapons of all spiritual warfare are truth and reason.

17. Omit *to eat*. **the hidden manna.** Jewish legend said that, before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, the ark and its contents had been hidden by Jeremiah in Mt. Sinai, and that it would be manifested in the days of the Messiah (2 Macc. ii. 5–7). Thus the promise that they would eat of the hidden manna is equivalent to saying that they would have a part in the Messianic kingdom. This promise would have greater point if

the temptation against which John was warning his readers was the joining in guild-feasts, or the buying of meat that had been offered in idol temples. **and I will give him a white stone . . . written.** Some of the conjectures with regard to this symbol are as follows: 1. A pebble used in casting lots, the colour white denoting good luck. 2. The *tessera* of honour, which the victors in the Olympian games received, and by which the right of public maintenance was secured to them. But the epithet white is not explained by this. 3. The white stone of liberation, the vote for acquittal being a white pebble. The person so acquitted was called *nikōn*, 'conqueror.' 4. The *tessera hospitalis*, upon which was the name of the host who received the guest in his house (Ewald). Not one of these is entirely satisfactory. Most probably the symbol is connected with some social or religious practice at Pergamum the key to which has been lost. Whose name is to be inscribed on the stone, Christ's or the believer's? If the former, the thought is suggested that Christ is known to every individual soul according to what He has been to it. If the latter, that every one will have an individual character known to Christ and to himself alone, the eternal secret between the soul and God.

The Message to the Church in Thyatira: 'Weakness made strong' (ii. 18–29).

After leaving Pergamum, the bearer of the messages would turn eastward, and proceed along the Caicus valley for about 20 miles. He would then turn southward, and after a journey of other 20 miles would arrive in Thyatira, an important town in the valley of the Lycus, a tributary of the Hermus. (For Thyatira, see art. in Hastings' *D.B.*)

18. **the Son of God.** Thyatira was the city of the seven that seemed of least importance. Perhaps the church, too, was small and struggling. It would therefore encourage it to be reminded that the Son of God Himself had an interest in it. **Who hath**

His eyes . . . fire (i. 14). Regarding the truth of the estimate of their spiritual condition they need have no doubt, since it was made by Him whose eyes see clearly. Whatever praise is given is merited ; whatever warning is uttered must be attended to.

19. **I know thy works.** These are further described as love, faith, ministry, endurance, progress. Christ first acknowledges all that is to be said in the church's favour. *charity*, R.V. **love.** *service*, R.V. **ministry**, *i.e.* to the poor and the sick. Cf. Lydia's hospitality to Paul. One member may create a tradition in a church. **patience**, rather endurance. In a church like that of Thyatira, where there was no outstanding challenge as in Ephesus or Pergamum, the grace of going on and offering a passive resistance to the numbing influences of the world is one that Christ appreciates. **that thy last . . . first.** There had been progress in the right direction. It might be small and imperceptible to human eyes and almost incredible to themselves ; but the eyes that are as a flame of fire discerned it. It takes the eyes of the Lord to discern and measure the slow, small increments of spiritual strength that we achieve. But surely to church or to individual there could be no more encouraging message than that the Master whom we are serving takes note of and fully acknowledges every faithfulness that we show. See the passage beginning 'all, the world's coarse thumb,' in Browning's *Rabbi Ben Ezra.*

20. Omit *a few things*, and read **I have against thee that. thou sufferest.** Their first fault was toleration of the presence of an evil influence. *to teach and to seduce*, R.V. **and she teacheth and seduceth.** Not by words merely but by influence and example did she lead astray. **the woman Jezebel.** Some ancient authorities read *thy wife*, *i.e.* of the bishop of the church. But this is now generally rejected.

To arrive at a true interpretation, several things have to be borne in mind. 1. Almost certainly an actual woman is indicated, either under her own, or, more likely, under the symbolic name Jezebel. 2. This woman was a member of the church at

Thyatira, and was accepted as such by all (thou sufferest). 3. She was a woman possessed of great gifts of speech and teaching (calleth herself a prophetess), who exercised a strong influence in the counsels of the church, as Jezebel did in Israel. 4. In the view of the writer she was misusing her gifts and influence by employing them in a direction that would make for moral laxity and ultimate death. 5. The accusations that are set forth against her give the writer's estimate of the character of her influence couched in symbolic language.

An explanation that seems adequately to meet all the requirements of interpretation is found in the very difficult relation of Christians to the trade-guilds that played so important a part in the life of Thyatira. See art. Thyatira in Hastings' *D.B.* With regard to these it was only natural that there should be a stricter and a laxer party in the church. The latter would advocate that Christians should remain in the guilds and participate in their advantages, if not in their feasts. At the head of this party was a woman of great mental gifts and persuasive speech, who claimed to interpret the will of God, and who was able, if not to win the majority to her side, at least to secure toleration of her position within the church.

21. The evil had already existed for some time (*I gave her time*), and had been the subject of earnest expostulation and warning. But all John's endeavours to bring the opposite party to his views had been fruitless. This he attributes to stubborn wilfulness (*she willeth not*).

22. *I will cast*, R.V. **I do cast.** For the judgment is imminent. **Bed** or couch, such as were used at guild-feasts. Those who sympathise with her will recline with her at a banquet, not of happiness, but of tribulation. **them that commit.** These would be the party that sided with her, probably a minority, though an influential minority. **except they repent of** *their deeds*, R.V. **her works.** There was still hope of escaping these threats by repentance. The writer seems to have entertained no hope that she would repent. So dominating was her influence that the evils

are called *her works*, as if her followers were mere puppets in her hands.

23. **her children.** Those who adhere to her teachings and practices. **death,** *i.e.* plague and pestilence ; cf. vi. 8. It was a common belief that sin against God might be punished by disease or disaster. **all the churches shall know.** The punishment of Thyatira would be an object-lesson to all, and a proof of Christ's omniscience and righteousness. **He that searcheth the reins and hearts.** In O.T. psychology the reins (kidneys) represented the will and the affections : the heart, the thoughts. Christ here claims for Himself attributes which in the O.T. are applied to God. ('*Trieth the reins*,' Ps. vii. 9, etc. ; '*give unto each one*,' Ps. lxii. 12.)

24. **But unto you I say, and unto the rest.** *And* is to be omitted, thus making the second clause of the sentence define the first instead of adding to it. **which know not** : rather 'such as know not.' Such knowledge depends ultimately on character. **the deep things of Satan, as they say.** It is probable that the writer is here caricaturing a phrase that was much on the lips of the opposite party. Probably *as they say* belongs to the *deep things*, while *of Satan* is a sarcastic addition of the writer's : 'Those who know not the deep things, as they say, ay, the deep things of Satan, I call them.' The laxer party perhaps professed to base their position on enlightenment. They would speak of their opponents with pity as 'those who know not the deep things.' **none other burden.** These words are a reminiscence of the apostolic council (Acts xv. 28).

26. **overcometh.** This is further explained in the phrase '**keepeth My works unto the end.**' Victory is the result of going on and not fainting or growing weary. *power*, R.V. **authority over the nations.** To the weak church authority is promised as the reward of faithfulness. Authority, of course, means the authority that comes from character. **as the vessels of a potter are broken to shivers.** These words characterise the extent of the rule. 'He is to rule the nations with as absolute a mastery as is

expressed in smashing a potsherd' (Simcox). **as I also have received of My Father.** The character of the Church's power over the world must ever be of the same kind and rest on the same grounds as that of its Lord and Master. The Church has indeed proved the most disintegrating force that the world has seen, but it works disintegration through love.

28. **I will give him the morning star.** The church whose life is small, but whose strength is going on from more to more, is still in the morning, with the hopes of the morning. It shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

The Message to the Church in Sardis: 'The City of Death' (iii. 1–6).

From Thyatira a journey of 30 miles to the S.E. would bring the messenger to Sardis, a city of old renown. (For Sardis, see art. in Hastings' *D.B.*)

Chap. iii. 1. **He that hath the seven Spirits of God.** In this description of Christ as possessed of the fulness of the energy of God there is both warning and encouragement to the Church of Sardis. He as the fountain of life stands in sharp contrast to the dead or dying church, and to Him it must turn in its need. As it was self-confidence that was the secret of decay, so it was a return to Christ that would give new life. **and the seven stars** (i. 16). However low Sardis had fallen, her star was still in the hand of Christ. **I know thy works.** The analogy of the other letters would lead us to expect that these words would be followed by words of commendation. But there is no ground for commendation of Sardis. Her life was merely a name to live; she was dead. **and thou art dead.** The form of the sentence renders it more emphatic (cf. on Smyrna: 'but thou art rich'). In outward appearance the church of Sardis was flourishing, but its spiritual vitality was low. A reputation for life may linger long after the reality has gone. What led to this sad condition of

Sardis is not mentioned, but it may be inferred. The faithful few are commended on the ground that they have not defiled their garments. Sardis and Lydia generally had an evil reputation for luxury and licentiousness, and the church may have become infected with the plague.

2. **Be thou watchful**, rather 'become watchful.' Watchfulness was not the habitual temper of Sardis. It had, therefore, to be acquired. Though the situation was grave, it was not desperate. This injunction would come home with great force to the church in a city that had twice been taken through over-security.[1] There was a weak side to the church, just as there was a weak side to the city. Its greatest danger was that it thought itself secure. *strengthen*, R.V. **stablish the things that remain.** Some things had gone beyond recovery. In all failure to live up to the highest there is loss that is irretrievable. *are ready to die*, R.V. **were ready**, 'were on the point of.' The writer takes it for granted that his appeal will be effectual, and he looks back from the standpoint of the things that remain stablished and secured upon the present condition as already only a memory. By suggesting that he has faith in the church's willingness to rise to the highest, he makes it all the more likely that it will do so. *not found thy works perfect*, R.V. **found no work of thine fulfilled**, or, 'up to the mark.' *before God*. The reading of the R.V. **before my God**, is more solemn and impressive.

3. Like the church of Ephesus (ii. 5), the church of Sardis is enjoined to recall the past; but while the one is urged to remember the high standard of the former life, the other is thrown back on the former teaching. *how thou hast received and heard*, R.V. **hast received and didst hear.** Here the perfect calls attention to the 'abiding responsibility for the trust received,' while the past recalls the process—hearing—through which they received it. **If thou shalt not watch . . . as a thief.** The sudden

[1] In 549 B.C., when Sardis was besieged by Cyrus, and again in 218 B.C., when it was besieged by Antiochus III., common soldiers accidentally discovered a way up the undefended precipitous rock, and thus the city was taken.

v. Herodotus I ϕ 43.

coming of the thief was a common occurrence in N.T. countries and times, and therefore was an oft-used figure for the sudden coming of the Lord. **what hour**, rather, 'what manner of hour.' The time depends upon the fitness of the world. Christ will come when the world is prepared for Him, either through its having become meet to be the Kingdom of God, or through its having filled up the cup of its iniquity.

4. *thou hast*, R.V. **But thou hast.** In most of the letters commendation precedes condemnation, because in the case of most of the churches the faults were exceptions to their general worth. But here commendation, such as was possible, follows condemnation, because faithfulness is the exception. The majority of the church had followed the line of least resistance; and corruption so far pervaded the church that its outstanding characteristic was death. *which have not defiled*, R.V. **did not defile.** The tense suggests that some recent and particular incident which had taken place since John was exiled was in view. But he had been gladdened by the news that there had been found some 'faithful among the faithless.' These few were perhaps despised by the majority as narrow and fanatical. Yet they alone were the living church in Sardis. **even in Sardis.** R.V. omits *even*. **they shall walk with Me.** This dignified language suggests solemn processional movement, hence fellowship and companionship. Cf. 'They that follow the Lamb' (xiv. 14). The **white** signifies purity and triumph. 'The language reflects that of votive inscriptions in Asia Minor, where soiled clothes disqualified the worshippers and dishonoured the god' (Moffatt).

5. *the same shall be clothed*, R.V. **shall thus be arrayed. Thus** signifies 'as being victor,' rather than 'after the manner of the faithful few.' The language is impressive, and suggests a solemn investiture. **white garments.** 'Heavenly garments' was a common apocalyptic figure for the bodies with which the souls of the saints shall be clothed at the resurrection. **blot out his name . . . life.** The book of life is a common O.T. image. (See on

xiii. 8.) The name of the city was gradually being blotted out of the book of life. So with the church, in as far as it was allowing itself to succumb to the same spirit. **I will confess.** The life of Sardis was a virtual denial of Christ.

The Message to the Church in Philadelphia: 'The Missionary City' (iii. 7–13).

Less than 30 miles S.E. of Sardis lay Philadelphia. (For Philadelphia, see art. in Hastings' *D.B.*)

7. **He that is holy, He that is true** (i. 5). He who sends the message is Himself in its fulness what He desires the church to be, and what He can make it. The epithet *holy* is applied to Christ only in this passage; elsewhere, *e.g.* in vi. 10, to God. **He that hath the key of David.** The nearest feature to this in the portrait of Christ is, 'I have the keys of death and of Hades' (i. 18). The present verse is a loose quotation from Isa. xxii. 22. The key indicates authority, and corresponds to the wand of office or the portfolio of a minister in modern days. But taken along with what follows, and especially with the favourable situation of Philadelphia for mission work, there is probably the additional thought that Christ is the giver of all opportunity.

8. **I know thy works . . . that thou hast a little power.** Perhaps the church was of recent foundation, and had not yet obtained great influence in the city. *hast kept, hast not denied*, R.V. **didst keep, didst not deny**, *i.e.* in some recent crisis, perhaps persecution at the hands of the hostile Jews. The key to the reference has been lost; but for Christians of all times, it gives the comforting thought that Christ knows the events in our lives that are unable to impress themselves upon the memory of the world. **and** has almost the force of *and yet*. **behold, I have set before thee a door opened, which none can shut.** The R.V. puts this in parenthesis. The insistence on it shows that the writer had a vivid sense of the advantages of Philadelphia and of the possibilities of its situation. **a door opened** is a symbol often

used in the N.T. of opportunities for the preaching of the gospel.

A city drawing its trade from the less cultured Interior would have many an opportunity of influencing for Christ the people with whom it came into contact. So in our mission fields, when Christian converts go to trade in districts that are still heathen, they open schools, speak to the people about Christ, hold services on the Sabbath ; and often they receive the seal of God's approval upon their efforts.

9. The church of Philadelphia had to endure the same persecution of contempt that the Hebrew Christians had to meet, perhaps with the added malignity, that the hostile Jews tried to counteract their work in the Interior. But Jesus gives the promise that one day the persecutors will be compelled to acknowledge that the Christians are under the shadow of His love. The R.V. brings out the broken character of the original. **synagogue of Satan, of them which say** cf. ii. 9. It was Smyrna and Philadelphia, the two churches that received almost unqualified praise, that suffered most at the hands of the Jews. **make them to come and worship.** It was God's promise to Zion that the heathen that had afflicted her would be brought to acknowledge that God was with her. The Christian Church takes the place of Zion, and the unbelieving Jews are regarded as the heathen. **I** is emphatic, and is intended to bring home to Jewish adversaries the futility of their opposition.

10. *hast kept*, R.V. **didst keep**, pointing to some definite occasion. **the word of My patience.** This means 'the word summoning to patience or endurance.' **I also** is emphatic. As they had done their part, so would Christ be faithful in the doing of His. **will keep thee from.** This does not mean that the Christians of Philadelphia will be kept from having to endure the hour of trial, but that they will be kept from failing before it. 'Will keep thee, so that thou wilt come forth unscathed from' (cf. 'them that come victorious from the beast,' xv. 2). Faithfulness is the best security.

them that dwell upon the earth. This phrase almost always has a bad sense in the Apocalypse (see on xiv. 6).

11. The R.V. omits *Behold.* **I come quickly.** It was a stimulus to endurance that the time of suffering would be short. **hold fast** (ii. 25). Philadelphia must not lie on her oars, or through slackness run the risk of missing her reward. **that no man take,** *i.e.* take away from thee, by inducing thee to succumb before the trial.

12. **a pillar in the temple.** The temple as a symbol of the Christian Society and the Christian life is frequently found in the N.T. In Greek temples, *e.g.* the temple of Diana which must have met John's eyes every day in Ephesus, the pillar had an outstanding place, giving to the building an aspect of stability and massiveness. So they whose victory comes through endurance and patience in well-doing shall have their character so strengthened and consolidated, that they shall take the place of the pillar in the spiritual temple that is rising to the glory of God They shall be the strength, the support, the backbone of the Christian Society. The image would gain additional point if Strabo is correct in speaking of the shaking, unstable walls of Philadelphia. **he shall go out thence no more.** Professor Ramsay thinks that there is here a reference to the fact that, through fear of the earthquake shocks, the city was largely deserted by its inhabitants, who encamped in the open country. This hardly seems a sufficient explanation of the phrase, but the key to any other has not yet been discovered. **I will write upon him.** 'The provincial priest of the imperial cultus erected his statue in the temple at the close of his year's official reign, inscribing on it his own name and his father's, his place of birth and year of office' (Moffatt). **the name.** In Biblical usage *name* has the significance of character. **the name of My God.** He that is holy will make His people what He Himself is. **the name of the city of My God.** They shall be acknowledged citizens, as having a place in the perfected Society. **the new Jerusalem . . . My God.** See xxi. 2, 20. **My own new name.** This name, which can be only

the name *Saviour*, is new because it was won through the Incarnation and the Cross. Jesus promises here that our share in His own saving work will be acknowledged. 'The soul that in obedience to God is growing into His likeness is dedicated to the Divine love, to the hope of the perfect Society, and to the ever new knowledge of redemption and the great Redeemer.'[1]

One cannot fail to be struck with the majesty of the language of this verse.

The Message to the Church in Laodicea: 'The City of Compromise' (iii. 14–22).

Leaving Philadelphia, the messenger would continue his journey towards the S.E. for about 60 miles, and, after crossing the Mæander and the Lycus, would come to Laodicea, one of an important group of cities in the Lycus valley, the others being Hierapolis and Colossæ. (For Laodicea, see art. in Hastings' *D.B.*)

14. **the Amen, the faithful and true witness.** The appeal to the church in Laodicea is made in the name of Him who was the perfect example of those qualities in which it was so signally lacking. The writer would shame them out of their condition by reminding them so forcibly of what Christ is. **the Amen.** He whose character is the guarantee of His word. **the beginning of the creation of God.** He is 'the active source and principle of God's creation or universe' (Moffatt). Here we have the 'Logos idea without the name Logos' (Beyschlag). This is a clear echo of Paul's teaching in Colossians.

15. **I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot.** The condition of the church of Laodicea was one of lukewarmness. It was neither untouched with spiritual life, nor fervent. And to know its character was to know what its works must be, for character and works must be in accord. Cf. Dante, *Inferno*, III.

[1] Phillips Brooks.

A.S.H. 1921/43

34–42. **I would thou wert cold or hot.** Many have found difficulty in understanding how coldness can be better than lukewarmness. Such a verdict would often mean condemnation of large sections of the Church. But two things are to be remembered: 1. There may be more hope of awakening those who are untouched by religion than those on whom, through long familiarity, the truth has lost its grip (see Matt. xxi. 31). 2. The sternness of the condemnation may be due to the fact that the writer had a definite crisis in view in which Laodicea had shown itself neither for God nor God's enemies. There is in this wish the spirit of Browning's *Lost Leader* and *The Statue and the Bust*. Those who in a particular crisis have failed to take sides are reprobated by both parties. Of this Erasmus is the classical instance in history.

16. Christ in this homely but expressive metaphor says that from spiritual lukewarmness He has a revulsion. **I will.** This statement is emphatic but not unconditional. All God's judgments are conditional upon man's refusal to repent.

17. This verse gives a picture of a wealthy, self-satisfied, blinded church. **Because thou sayest.** The condition of Laodicea was worse even than that of Sardis. The favourable estimate on *her* life was made by others: 'Thou hast a name that thou livest.' But the complacent satisfaction with the life of Laodicea was entertained by herself: 'Thou sayest, I am rich.' *increased in goods.* The R.V. **I have gotten riches,** brings out that one element in the complacency of Laodicea was that it was self-made. As a city Laodicea had been of little account till the Roman period. And those who have been suddenly lifted from poverty to riches, whether communities or individuals, are apt to be filled with pride and arrogance. Perhaps no more severe test could be put upon a man's character than the experience of a sudden elevation from comparative poverty to wealth. **have need of nothing.** It was the grand boast of the city that in the year 60 A.D. it was able to recover itself from the effects of an earthquake without imperial aid. **and knowest not.** The greatest

poverty is that which is ignorant of itself. Of Smyrna Christ said, 'I know thy poverty, but thou art rich.' Of Laodicea, 'Thou sayest that thou art rich, but thou art poor.' **that thou.** The pronoun is emphatic, and has almost the force of 'Thou who boastest so: Thou art just the one who art.' *wretched*, R.V. **the wretched one.** The article gives the phrase the force of 'the embodiment of wretchedness' (Moffatt).

18. **I counsel thee.** The church that takes such a pathetically distorted view of its own condition is in need of advice and guidance. And that is all that Christ can in the first instance give. **to buy.** But what had they to buy with? **Buy of Me!** That makes all the difference. When one has resolved to buy of Christ, the price is easily settled. **of Me.** 'A forgotten lesson' (Moffatt). Hope for them was not in themselves, but in Christ. *gold tried in the fire*, R.V. **refined by fire.** They had attained the poverty of an untroubled life through compromise with the world. They could attain the refined gold of character only by resistance to the world, perhaps by persecution at its hands. *mayest be rich*, R.V **become.** The word *rich* is emphatic 'rich indeed.' **white garments.** Perhaps this is a reference to the rich garments of Laodicea made from the glossy black wool of their sheep. There may be a suggestion, too, of garments defiled through compromise, as in the case of Sardis through vice. But the main idea is not defilement but nakedness. They had not a shred of spirituality to cover themselves with. **that the shame of thy nakedness** *do not appear*, R.V. **be not made manifest**, as it surely would be when Christ came to judgment. The discovery of nakedness would entail disgrace. If they could be made to fear it there was yet hope. It is when men have ceased to feel shame that hopelessness has been reached. *anoint thine eyes with eye-salve*, R.V. **buy eye-salve to anoint thine eyes.** The word used is 'collyrium,' the technical name for medicines made up in small cakes: cf. tabloids. Galen mentions that a special kind of ointment was originally prepared only in Laodicea, and a medicine for the eyes called Phrygian Powder had wide fame.

that thou mayest see. They were afflicted with moral blindness. Hence their distorted view of their own condition.

19. **As many as I love.** *I* is emphatic: 'Whatever others do' (Moffatt). **love.** The word of tender meaning is employed. *rebuke*, R.V. **reprove**, in word; **chasten**, in act. By the twofold means God seeks to work conviction of sin. **be zealous.** Give over spiritual trifling and be earnest.

20. Professor Ramsay thinks that in ver. 20 the writer begins a conclusion belonging to the messages as a whole. It seems better, however, to suppose that the letter to Laodicea was concluded in the same form as the others. It is God's way also that with the sternest judgment mercy is mingled. Grave as the condition of Loadicea is, it is not yet desperate. The very severity of the rebuke is a sign that there is still hope. The power of spiritual recovery is marvellous, and sometimes the recovery is sudden. **Behold, I stand.** The pleading of the Saviour with the soul, the impossibility of His forcing His way in, the pathetic wistfulness with which He listens for the slightest sound of movement inside, the dreariness of the fast-closed door, the folly of keeping it closed, are all suggested in the exquisite pathos of Holman Hunt's picture, 'The Light of the World.' **hear My voice.** He not only knocks but calls, so that we may know that it is no enemy that is seeking admittance. **I will come in to him.** The highest fellowship follows on the entrance of Christ. **will sup with him, and he with Me.** Christ will take what we can give, and what we lack, He will supply. What He contributes will make the feast memorable. The guest will prove to be indeed the host. For what Christ will bring to those who admit Him to their board, see Luke xxiv. 30 f.

21. **I will give to him to sit down with Me in My throne.** The Laodiceans plumed themselves on their supremacy. But if they conquer in this struggle they shall reign indeed. They will attain the same glory as Christ has attained, but only in the same way. *am set down*, R.V. **sat down**, *i.e.* at His ascension.

THE WRITER'S RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY.

ITS FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE.

God the Creator.

With chap. iv. the writer enters upon his main theme by asserting by means of appropriate symbolism the existence and sovereignty of God. His readers found themselves up against a throne on which Domitian, a monster in the shape of a man, sat and received the homage of the world. But there was a throne above Domitian's, and He who sat upon it received the worship of the inhabitants of heaven and of all the forms of being that had come from His hand. Behind all and over all was God.

Chap. iv. 1. **After these things I saw.** This formula is used over and over again to introduce some specially important vision. **behold, a door opened in heaven,** *i.e.* standing open. For the time being the barriers to his realising spiritual things are removed. The seer did not see the opening of the door. The door stood open before him when he turned his eyes heavenward. All revelation of spiritual things is a mystery. We cannot tell how it comes. When we look, lo, spiritual reality is manifest to our sight. A door is always standing open in heaven could we only see it. *the first voice which I heard, was as it were of a trumpet,* R.V. **the first voice . . . heard, a voice as of a trumpet speaking with me.** It was the voice that had summoned him at the first to write (i. 10). This reference rivets the two sections of the Book together. *as of a trumpet* is descriptive. 'The first voice

that I heard, the trumpet-like voice, yet of one speaking with me.' It was trumpet-like in its loudness and arrestingness and authority, yet it spoke in human tones that he could understand. **one, saying,** is a nominative—'Behold, one saying.' **Come up hither.** This is an invitation to take up the spiritual point of view. Hitherto the seer's attention has been fixed on the state of the churches. But it is not by contemplating the possibilities of progress that are visible in the world itself, but by a vision of the resources of God to cope with the situation, that faith in the victory of good over evil can be attained. We must see earth as it lies in the lap of heaven before we can believe in any future for it. **which must come to pass,** *i.e.* in the working out of God's plan.

2. **Straightway I was in the Spirit** (cf. i. 10). The things of sense fade into the background, and wave after wave of inspiration streams into his soul. *behold, a throne was set*, R.V. **behold, there was a throne set.** The throne is the symbol of sovereignty. The seer did not see the setting up of the throne. God's sovereignty is an eternal fact which is revealed to the eye that is opened to spiritual things. Isaiah also saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up (chap. vi.). In Ezekiel's vision (chap. i.) the seat of God is not a fixed throne, but a moving chariot, symbolising the all-pervasiveness of the Divine presence rather than the dignity and stability of His government. This thought of God as sovereign ever comes to the front to strengthen and console at times when the Church in its earthly weakness is engaged in conflict with the strong brutal forces of the world. *One sat on the throne*, R.V. **One sitting upon the throne.** The R.V. draws the attention to the existence rather than to the attitude of God. The indefiniteness of the phrase admirably suggests the mystery and ineffableness of the sovereign power, while at the same time asserting its personality. So in the vision of Isaiah there is the same marvellously effective forbearance from attempting to describe Jehovah, except in symbolic terms. What He is in Himself, is beyond the power of man to describe or to comprehend. The accompanying features

of the theophany are employed to suggest His attributes. Cf. Browning's

> 'No face: only the sight
> Of a sweepy garment, vast and white,
> With a hem that I could recognise.'

'The throne and one sitting upon it' presents a single idea—a person who bears sovereignty.

3. While the writer makes no attempt to unfold what God is in Himself, he lays the richest symbolism under contribution to describe the impression made upon his mind by the vision of God. **to look upon** or 'in appearance.' **a jasper stone.** From the epithet 'crystal clear' in xxi. 11, it may be inferred that by the jasper was meant a transparent stone like rock-crystal; while the fact that in the same verse it is spoken of as 'most precious' suggests that it may have been the diamond. *Sardine stone* or **sardius**, so called from Sardis where it was found, was perhaps the cornelian, of a deep red, the colour of blood or fire. **rainbow.** This feature may be used simply as a conventional concomitant of a manifestation of God, meant to heighten the glory of His presence. Some have seen in it, however, a reference to God's faithfulness to His covenant. The rainbow is represented as forming a great arch over the throne. **emerald.** It has been conjectured that the stone meant here is colourless rock-crystal, showing a rainbow of prismatic hues.

This revelation of God, symbolised by the brilliance of precious stones with the light shining through them, was not a 'revelation of crushing power, but of perfect untroubled righteousness, of light with no darkness at all' (Maurice). See Ex. xxiv. 10.

4. The glory of God is enhanced by the relations in which He stands to the beings whom He has created.

And round about the throne were four-and-twenty *seats*, R.V. **thrones.** These are pictorially conceived as being twelve on the one side and twelve on the other, or as standing in a circle round the central throne, and altogether forming a heavenly consistory. **elders sitting,** *i.e.* in impressive dignity. The elders are not to

be looked upon as representative of the Church or of mankind, but are thought of as the heavenly beings that are nearest to God (see Isa. xxiv. 23). The addition of the elders is intended to render the session of God more impressive. **arrayed in white garments** suggests purity. **on their heads crowns of gold**, the symbol of royalty and authority.

It is uncertain whether any significance underlies the number four-and-twenty. It may have been the conventional number of the elders, just as seven seems to have been the accepted number of the archangels. It is probable that some symbolical meaning lay in the number, though it is impossible now to say with certainty what it was.

5. *proceeded*, R.V. **proceed**, a constant manifestation of the Divine presence. **lightnings and voices and thunders.** The most terrible phenomena of nature are employed to suggest the majesty of God, and to evoke the awe of man. This feature is traditional in theophanies. Every feature that served to enhance God's majesty would increase hope and strength in the hearts of the Christians. For this God was their God. **voices.** 'The shrieks and roaring blasts of the storm' (Moffatt). For the 'voice of the Lord' in the thunder, see Ps. xxix. **the seven Spirits of God.** The number seven has probably its usual signification of completeness, so that the phrase would mean the all-pervasive influence of the Spirit of God, or 'the unity of the Spirit in all the diversity of His operations' (Anderson Scott). This feature represents the activity of God, and supplements the serenity expressed in the figure of 'One sitting upon a throne.' The connection of the Spirit of God with fire is seen in Acts ii. 3. The last clause of this verse has, however, the appearance of an explanatory addition by another hand than the author's.

6. Before the throne was a floor whose brightness and transparency made it look like a sea of glass (cf. Rev. xv. 2; see also the impressive imagery of Ex. xxiv. 10). **in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne.** This is perhaps best

explained as 'in the centre of each side and sustaining it' (cf. Ezek. i., *four beasts*, R.V. living creatures, **full of eyes before and behind.** Dr. Farrar calls these 'the immortalities.' The eyes represent intelligence and vigilance.

7. Each of these living creatures probably made a distinct suggestion to the mind of John which it is now impossible to discover with certainty. The lion may have suggested strength: the ox (a young powerful bull), vitality; the man, reason; the flying eagle, soaring imagination. In the Early Church these types of life were associated with the four Evangelists. 'The man was assigned to Matthew, the lion to Mark, the ox to Luke, and the eagle to John, as typifying respectively the human, active, sacrificial and spiritual ideas of the gospel' Westcott, *Introduction to N.T.*, p. 249).

8. **six wings.** This image, which is taken from the description of the seraphim in Isa. vi., symbolises perfection of equipment for the service of God. **full of eyes round about and within,** *i.e.* beneath their wings. These denote 'the secret energies of nature' (Swete). This feature is taken from Ezek. i. 18. *they rest not*, R.V. **they have no rest.** That unceasing praise was offered to God by the inhabitants of heaven is a common idea in Jewish religious literature. With this verse is to be contrasted the 'they have no rest' of xiv. 11. **Holy, holy, holy,** etc. The *trisagion*, the threefold ascription of holiness, is taken from Isa. vi. But even from so notable a passage there are divergences to suit the new conditions. For 'sabbaoth' of the LXX. the writer uses **the Almighty**; for 'the whole earth is full of His glory' he has **which was, and which is, and which is to come.** It was the crux of the situation that the whole earth was not full of the glory of God. Worldly glory filled all the foreground. But in the progressive manifestation of God there is the guarantee that God shall be glorified on earth as in heaven.

John has derived the features of his vision both from Ezekiel and Isaiah. The symbolism of the old prophets had passed into the common stock of religious imagery. But John's vision is not

a slavish copy of any O.T. theophany. The details are combined with the greatest freedom and originality.

At intervals the seer is permitted to overhear songs of praise that are raised in heaven to the glory of God. These outbursts of song have been compared to the choral odes of a Greek play. In the Greek drama the chorus occupied the point of view of the ideal spectator, its function being to guide the thoughts and feelings of the audience with regard to what was being represented on the stage. So the praises of heaven, overheard upon earth, were intended to draw forth the appropriate response from the seer and his readers.

9–11. The song of Creation.

9. **when**, rather 'as often as.' *give glory*, R.V. **shall give glory.** Not yet does the perfect song of praise rise from Creation. But as Creation, advancing from stage to stage, realises the possibilities that are open to her, an ever richer song of glory and thanks shall rise to God. It will be an eternal song, whose ever increasing richness is expressed by saying that the act is ever repeated in fuller strain, as Creation becomes conscious of ever new revelations of the inexhaustibleness of God's purpose. The course of creation is an endless series of surprises to itself. So may Christians infer that God's dealings with them will manifest like surprises, and call for like songs of praise.

The majestic language in which God is named has the same suggestion of comfort. **to Him that sitteth upon the throne** suggests the authority that is above all earthly authority; while **to Him that liveth for ever and ever** reminds them that, while the kings of the earth pass away and their policy with them, He who claims their allegiance even unto death is from everlasting to everlasting, and of His faithfulness there is no end.

10. The elders join with the living creatures in praising God for the wonders of creation. *fall down*, R.V. **shall fall down.** This was the Eastern way of rendering homage. **cast their crowns before the throne.** Tacitus says that Tiridates, king of Armenia, laid down his crown before the image of Nero in token of

homage for his kingdom. So the elders acknowledge that all they have of life they derive from God.

11. *Thou art worthy.* R.V. has the more emphatic **Worthy art Thou.** *O Lord,* R.V. **Our Lord and our God.** There is perhaps an intended contrast between the worthiness of God and the unworthiness of Cæsar. Suetonius tells how a letter written in the name of Domitian ran, *Dominus et Deus noster hoc fieri jubet* ('Our Lord and God commands this to be done'. Here the inhabitants of heaven give to God the same name, 'Our Lord and our God.' *glory and honour and power,* R.V. **the glory and the honour and the power.** The article gives the sense of 'the supreme glory,' etc. *hast created,* R.V. **didst create,** at a definite point of time. *for Thy pleasure,* R.V. **because of Thy will, they were,** *i.e.* they had their being. Dualism is not tenable. The essential substance of things came into being through the same will that in the process of creation gave them their form.

The Lamb that was Slain. v. 1-6

Chap. iv. does not advance beyond the O.T. conception of God. It unfolds His majesty and holiness. It asserts that His sovereignty is above all earthly sovereignty. But not by virtue of these attributes does God so come into contact with man as to be able to bring to pass the end that He has in view with regard to him. Chap. v. presents the aspect of the Godhead that is identified with the special revelation of the N.T.

Chap. v. 1. **And I saw.** The simple *And* shows that chap. v. does not begin a new subject, but carries forward to a new stage what is contained in chap. iv. **in the right hand,** R.V. marg. has *on.* The book was lying in the open palm of God.

By the book written and sealed and lying in the hand of God is to be understood the purpose of God known to Him in all its details and waiting to be realised. With regard to the contents of the book and the unfolding of these contents two views have

been held. 1. That the book contains the *record* of what is to come to pass. 2. That the loosing of the seals means the unfolding of the *course of history* itself. The former has been the usually accepted view, and the Book of Revelation has thus been regarded as disclosing the course of future events. But the whole trend of the argument is in favour of the latter interpretation. The purpose of the Apocalypse was not to reveal to curious minds the method of the consummation of all things; but to hearten the servants of Christ by showing them that all the events of history are under the control of Jesus. *sealed*, R.V. **close sealed**, or 'sealed down.' The number seven denotes that the book was completely closed. Not a single event could be brought into actuality except through the loosing of a seal. Much thought has been expended on the form of this book. How could the seals be so affixed as to be capable of being opened one after another, and yet be all visible to the seer at once? As in many another instance in the Apocalypse, the visual image is sacrificed to the wealth of the ideas that it contains. It seems hardly possible to image to ourselves a book or roll that will meet every requirement of the description. It is the impossibility of presenting in one image contradictory ideas,—simultaneousness and consecutiveness--God's eternal now and man's knowledge in time. Ever present to Him are the events that come to our consciousness one after another, as star after star rises above the horizon.

2. **a strong angel.** Over and over again it is stated that the angel, to whom a universal message is given to declare or a mighty task to accomplish, is a strong angel. **proclaiming**, uttering a challenge to the whole creation as the herald of a king. **with a great voice**—'for all the worlds to hear.' **Who is worthy?** The word suggests that the power to open the book must come through a moral and spiritual equipment.

3. *no man*, R.V. **no one** (including celestial beings), **was found worthy.** Thus is it intimated that the efficient factor in history is of a kind other than force. Striking emphasis is put on

the bankruptcy of the Universe by the use of the expressive formula: 'No one in the heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth'; as if world after world had had the challenge addressed to it, and each stood back, conscious of its inability to essay the task. **Or to look thereon.** *Or* has the force of 'or even.' Not only was there no one able to accomplish the task; none was bold enough to attempt it, or, as we say, 'look at it.' **under the earth,** *i.e.* in Hades, the place of the departed.

4. **And I wept much, because.** This is a dramatic way of saying that the seer knew no means by which the world's destiny could be accomplished. Man cannot of himself conceive the richness of the Divine nature. Doubt might well be entertained of the possibility of the Roman world of the first century ever becoming the new heaven and the new earth. Here we may have the record of many an hour of agony in the heart of John as he thought of the impossible task of the Church.

5. **one of the elders.** There must be some reason why the elders, and not the angels, should be able to enter into the feelings of man and satisfy his doubts (cf. vii. 13). Being nearer to God they have fuller knowledge of His mind, and a more sympathetic understanding of human needs. **Weep not.** From the standpoint of clearer vision, he knew that tears and doubts were unnecessary.

the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah. As the characteristic of Judah (Gen. xlix. 9) was lionlike strength and endurance, so He who gathered up the essential features of the tribe in their fulness had the right to be styled pre-eminently the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah. **the Root of David.** The meaning of the Heb. word is a shoot or sucker coming out from the main stem or from the root of a tree that has been cut down. He who shares the throne of Heaven and directs and controls all things was born of the seed of David according to the flesh. ***hath prevailed***, R.V. **overcome.** This expression is to be taken absolutely. 'A victory has been gained by Him,' in consequence

of which He is able. His battle and victory had been in the endurance of the Cross.

6. **in the midst of the throne**, etc. The question as to spatial position is not to be pressed. The idea is a spiritual one. Christ occupies the place in heaven that draws every eye towards Him. **a Lamb.** 'Lion of the tribe of Judah' would lead the seer to expect a symbol of strength. Hence his surprise at being confronted with a symbol of meekness. This is a dramatic way of expressing the truth that the efficient factor of history is gentleness, manifested in the suffering of injury at the hands of evil-doers. The idea may be intensified by the fact that the word used here is a diminutive, 'a little lamb.' **standing**, *i.e.* erect and living. **as though it had been slain**, *i.e.* bearing all the marks of having been slaughtered in sacrifice. **seven horns**, suggestive of unlimited strength and conquering might. **seven eyes**, the full endowment of the Divine Spirit, as the explanatory clause shows. The clause, however, may be an addition by a later hand. See iv. 5.

7. This verse gives a dramatic representation of the entrance of God's love in Christ as the efficient factor of human history. The tenses of the verbs (**He came and hath taken**, R.V. marg.) bring out the ideas that Christ entered into history by a definite act, and that the influences that flowed from it are eternal.

The significance of the taking of the book is expressed by the fact that it was the signal or the occasion for an outburst of praise which was taken up in ever-widening circles till all Creation joined in the song. This passage suggested to Milton the hymn of praise in Heaven when God had accepted the offer of His Son to give Himself to thwart the designs of Satan upon the world. (*Paradise Lost*, Book III. 345–371.)

8. **the four living creatures**, etc. Much useless speculation has been indulged in over this verse. 'How could living creatures hold both harps and vials?' 'How could the elders hold harps and yet fall prostrate and worship?' The Book of Revelation, more than any other book in the N.T., perhaps in the whole of

literature, offers opportunities for such questions as these, and its interpretation has suffered much from the prosaic answers given to them. Throughout the Book the accumulation of spiritual ideas far outruns the power of visual imagery. **The harp** or lyre or zithern was the traditional instrument of 'grave sweet melody.' The music of the harp intensifies the richness of the praise. **golden vials.** Many will prefer the translation 'vials,' consecrated by use, to the rendering of the R.V. **bowls.** *odours*, R.V. **incense**, which was the invariable accompaniment of worship (see on viii. 3–5). **which are the prayers of the saints.** More than most instances of the same kind this clause gives the impression of being a vein of prose thrust into a highly imaginative and poetical passage.

9. The immediate circle around the throne, those chief in dignity and nearness to God, are the first to take up the song of praise to the Lamb. *they sung*, R.V. **sing.** The song of praise once begun will never cease to resound through the universe. **a new song** (cf. xiv. 3). They have a new theme, redemption. **Worthy art Thou, for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase.** He who was able to redeem from sin was alone able to give the victory and the Kingdom on the earth. It is the self-sacrificing love of God as manifested in Christ that makes history 'move.' Cf. Carlyle's 'The Constitution will not march.' *hast redeemed*, R.V. **didst purchase.** Their redemption from sin was already accomplished.

unto God, *i.e.* to be God's. **with Thy blood**, rather 'in,' the Heb. prep. of price. *us* is to be omitted, as in the R.V. The elders and the living creatures are celestial beings that need no redemption. They rejoice in the addition of a new class to the inhabitants of Heaven. **men of every tribe**, etc. Word is piled upon word to express the universality and the catholicity of the redeemed body. The Kingdom of Christ will embrace a wider humanity than the Roman Empire.

10. **a kingdom and priests** (cf. i. 6, xx. 6). But if a kingdom, they must be loyal; and if priests, they must be offering sacrifice.

The numerous repetitions of the Book are not 'vain repetitions.' They are designed to strengthen the main impression. *they shall reign.* The best texts seem to prefer a present, **they reign.** It is to be noted that throughout this Book the work that Christ is represented as engaged in is giving the Kingdom on the earth to His little flock, and turning their sufferings into sovereignty. This would naturally suggest that the future is to be preferred. But this song of praise occupies the standpoint of celestial beings who see with 'larger, other eyes than ours.' The present may therefore be intended to suggest to the apparently defeated Christians that things are not what they seem. See Clough's poem, 'Say not the struggle nought availeth,' especially the lines :

> 'It may be, in yon smoke concealed,
> Your comrades chase e'en now the fliers,
> And, but for you, possess the field.'

11. The angels join with the living creatures and the elders in offering praise unto the Lamb. **and the number of them.** Doré in some of his illustrations of the *Paradiso*, *e.g.* the 'Rose of Heaven,' seems to be endeavouring to arouse by the impression of multitude the same inspiring emotions that the seer here aims at evoking. The little flock of Christ, few and feeble as they were, were at one with this vast multitude. The numbers are a reminiscence of Dan. vii. 10.

12. **Worthy is the Lamb.** The ascription of praise of the angels is not addressed directly to the Lamb as in the former case. *that was slain*, R.V. **that hath been slain.** This was the secret of His worthiness to undertake the further work of giving the victory to righteousness. In view of the symbolic meaning that the number seven has, the sevenfold blessing may denote the perfection of praise. The article stands only before the first, and, therefore, binds all into a unity.

13. The third circle of praise embraces all created beings. *creature*, R.V. **created thing.** **which is in the heaven.** Phrase is added to phrase to heighten the impression of the vastness of the

totality of created existence, and, consequently, of the richness of the swelling anthem that is rising to the glory of the Lamb. **Unto Him that sitteth . . . Lamb.** The Father and the Son are brought together in the redemption of mankind. 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.' Dominion is specially suitable in the doxology that rises from a world in which for the present the dominion seemed to be in other hands.

14. *Him that liveth for ever and ever* is to be omitted.

In Heaven as on earth it is always a deeper unfolding of the Divine nature that inspires every song of richer compass and intensity.

The Opening of the Seals.

Chap. vi. is the natural continuation of chaps. iv. and v. The writer, having put in the forefront the fundamental fact that behind all human history is God in Christ, goes on to show that history unfolding itself under His hand.

That Divine love is the motive-power of history does not imply that all calamitous phenomena are absent, but that they are under Christ's control. And therefore there is no experience, however calamitous, but may be made to subserve man's redemption. 'All things are yours.'

As seal after seal is opened various elements of history make their appearance on the stage. The series, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc., does not indicate sequence in time, but only sequence in narrative, and perhaps degrees of impressiveness.

1, 2. The opening of the first seal.

1. **Come.** Omit *and see.* The word *Come* is a summons to the phenomenon of history to take up its place on the stage. One of the four creatures utters the summons. This is a dramatic way of stating that under Christ they are the efficient forces or agents of history.

2. The representation of the phenomena by horses of various colours was probably suggested by Zechariah. The symbol of

the 1st element of history is a white horse, whose rider carries a bow, and is presented with a garland, and whose onward progress is one of continued conquest. **a white horse.** White was the sacred colour of the Parthians. It was used to denote good omen. It was the colour of triumph. The last is the most likely here. Conquest is the idea symbolised by the gift of the crown, the garland of victory, and by the uninterrupted progress of the rider. But who is the Conqueror? His identity is determined by the fact that he holds a bow, a weapon in the use of which the Parthians were expert.

That a Parthian invasion and conquest is represented first among the phenomena of contemporary history shows how 'the Parthian terror' must have brooded like a dark cloud over the imagination of the Eastern provinces. It was these that would bear the brunt of the savage onset. This conqueror is not the same as the Rider on the white horse of xix. 11.

3, 4. The opening of the second seal.

3. **another horse . . . a red horse,** *i.e.* fire-coloured or blood-coloured. The mission of this rider was to take peace from the earth so that its inhabitants should slay one another. The symbol of his commission was a great sword. These features point to War, perhaps more particularly Civil War. **peace from the earth.** Some ancient authorities read 'the peace of the earth' (R.V. marg.). The Roman Peace followed Roman Conquest. 'To take away the peace of' would mean to break in upon the settled government of the Empire. There was no period of the first century during which war was not raging in some place or other; and as the Romans looked upon the provinces as subject to them, such revolt would be regarded as rebellion or civil war.

5, 6. The opening of the third seal.

5. **a black horse.** The colour denotes sorrow or disaster. **had,** literally, 'holding.' The participle is more graphic. 'Behold, a black horse, and the rider holding a balance in his hand.' Not by visual symbol only, but also by speech from the midst of the

throne, and, therefore, with the Divine authority, is the meaning of this seal brought to John's apprehension. **measure**, Gr. chœnix, a small measure (R.V. marg.), was under two pints, and was the amount of grain considered sufficient to sustain a soldier or a working man for one day. **a penny**, Greek denarius, about 8½d., was a day's wage. **Barley** as the coarser grain was cheaper than wheat. It was a food to which soldiers were degraded by way of punishment. According to Cicero the normal value of 12 measures of wheat was a denarius, and of 12 measures of barley, half a denarius. That food should be eaten by measure in itself indicated scarcity. See Ezek. iv. 16. The degree of the scarcity is shown by two facts: 1. The work of a day would be sufficient to provide only bare food for the worker himself. 2. Recourse must be had to the coarser and cheaper foods. **the oil and the wine hurt thou not.** But in addition to prevailing scarcity there was another feature of the situation which is touched upon in these words. Towards the close of the first century so great was the danger of scarcity of food that, in the year 92 A.D., Domitian issued an edict for the diminution of the vine lands in the provinces with a view to increasing the land available for the production of corn. Such an edict would naturally arouse opposition on the part of the ignorant populace, and the last clause of this verse may represent their answer to the efforts of the government. The food-situation was thus composed of two elements, a growing scarcity, and a stupid opposition to organised effort to diminish the danger of scarcity. 'There is no bread; yes, but touch not the wine and the oil.'

7, 8. The opening of the fourth seal.

7. **a pale horse**, *i.e.* livid like a corpse. The rider on this horse is named Death. Death in this verse seems to have two meanings, the angel of death, and, more specifically, pestilence. Death the reaper is followed by Hades the garner. Hades, Heb. Sheol, which in the O.T. was the shadowy realm of the shadowy dead without distinction of moral character, gradually came to be looked upon as the place of punishment of the wicked.

Here the O.T. usage is reverted to. **there was given unto them authority over the fourth part of the earth.** The desolation was to be partial; perhaps nothing more specific can be said about *the fourth part.* **to kill with sword . . . beasts of the earth.** In these words all the agents of death that had gone before—the sword, famine, pestilence—are summed up. For the repossession of the earth by wild beasts as the natural result of the desolation caused by war, famine, and pestilence, see Deut. vii. 22; Ezek. xiv. 21; 2 Kings xvii. 25.

9–11. The opening of the fifth seal.

The opening of the fifth seal brought before the eye of the seer a vivid representation of Persecution. The souls of the martyrs underneath the altar are crying to God to avenge their blood. It must have been perplexing to the minds of Christians that God not only permitted His servants to be persecuted, but that their cry seemed to rise to a deaf heaven. Here it is suggested that this, too, is of Christ for the enriching of His Church. **underneath the altar.** According to late Jewish theology the souls of the just have their place under the throne of God, in His immediate presence. **slain,** *i.e.* in sacrifice. The Greek word is the same as that used in v. 6, 'a Lamb standing as though it had been slain.' There is thus here perhaps the fruitful suggestion that in suffering persecution they were walking in the footsteps of the Lord. **for the word of God.** This was the reason of John's exile in Patmos, 'for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus' (i. 9). The testimony of Jesus means the testimony which had been committed to Christ's people concerning Him. **testimony,** witness, is one of the outstanding ideas in this Book. Whose were these souls? The generally accepted interpretation is that they were the souls of those who had already fallen in the persecutions that had been inflicted on the Church. But perhaps a more general reference is admissible—to 'the noble army of martyrs,' who throughout the whole course of history have suffered for the word of God and for the testimony committed to them. The change from 'the testimony of Jesus'

of i. 9 to the more general 'testimony which they held,' favours the wider reference.

10. **with a great voice,** expressing the agony of their desire. For the various meanings to be given to 'great' in connection with the voice, see note on vii. 10. **O Master, the holy and true.** They make appeal by their relation to God and by His character. On these two grounds they might expect immediate vengeance to fall on the earth, guilty of the blood of the saints. **How long,** etc. This scene is a dramatic and symbolic representation of the truth that, by the laws under which God has placed the world, the hostility to Him that is embodied in the persecution of His servants will bring down judgment. Therefore the question which has sometimes been asked with regard to this passage, 'Whether this prayer for speedy vengeance represents the highest or even a high plane of Christian feeling?' is beside the point. The prayer is the emphatic statement of a moral fact and a moral difficulty—the moral fact being that vengeance will fall; the moral difficulty, that it does not fall immediately.

11. **a white robe.** See note on iii. 5. **yet for a little time** points to a consummation which is near at hand, and indirectly encourages the readers to endure. It is easier to encounter a sharp and short conflict than a prolonged watch. **which should be killed.** It is thus intimated to the readers that this may be their fate. **fulfilled.** The R.V. marg., following some ancient authorities, reads 'have fulfilled their course.' Probably two ideas are embraced in the word 1. Perfected through suffering; 2. Have their number completed.

In the utterance of this voice we have the answer to the agonised cry of ver. 10. Judgment cannot be finally pronounced upon the world till every phase of the world-conflict be past, and God prove victorious through all. Every phase will be carried on to its consummation through suffering and martyrdom. In the end the complete triumph of God will be revealed. But when the individual's conflict is over, his victory is secured; and he has only to wait for the close of the great world-battle Of

course the same answer that is represented as given to the perplexed souls in Heaven is also applicable to the perplexed souls on earth, from whom is often wrung, by the sight of cruelty and oppression, the agonised cry, 'O Lord! how long!' 'How can God bear it?'

12–17. The opening of the sixth seal

The opening of the sixth seal gives a vivid impression of a characteristic feature of the Roman world at this time, the terror felt at the occurrence of stupendous natural phenomena, such as earthquake, eclipse of sun and moon, and falling stars. Such phenomena were regarded as 'instruments of fear and warning' in the hand of the gods 'unto some monstrous state.' They were looked upon as foreboding civil and social disaster.

> 'When beggars die, there are no comets seen;
> The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes.'

12. **earthquake** was regarded as a sure sign of the breaking up of the world. Many of the cities of Asia Minor had suffered within recent memory from earthquakes; so that the image would not have the vague, far-off suggestion that it has for us. Judgment through eclipse of the sun and moon is often mentioned in the O.T. **sackcloth of hair** was a coarse cloth made from the hair of the black goat. *the moon*, R.V. **the whole moon.** This is perhaps a reference to the easily observable fact that an eclipse of the moon takes place only when it is full. **as blood** well expresses the deep copper-colour of the body when in eclipse (Joel ii. 31).

13. **the stars of heaven fell unto the earth.** In this passage the physical phenomenon of shooting stars is probably to be understood. But in other passages the phrase 'falling stars' has an apocalyptic meaning which will be noticed as it occurs. *untimely* **figs**, R.V. **unripe.** 'The untimely fig is a fig which, having formed too late to ripen in the autumn, hangs through the winter, but almost always drops off before the sap begins to rise in the Spring' (Simcox).

14. **the heaven was removed as a scroll when it is rolled up.** This prophetic image regards the firmament as a roof stretched over the earth and capable of being rolled up and laid aside like a roll of parchment. **every mountain and island.** Perhaps the disappearance of some small island in the Archipelago suggested the mention of islands.

15. Seven groups of sufferers are enumerated perhaps with the suggestion that the phenomena fell on the whole world. Actual personages, perhaps identifiable by his readers, may have floated before the mind of the writer. **kings,** such as Domitian. King was a common title given to the emperor in the East, where it was not so obnoxious to the ear as in Rome. *great men,* R.V. **princes.** The word in the original is said by Mommsen to be the title of a Parthian dignitary. As the members of the native Asian Council, the Asiarchs, took the leading part in harassing the Christians (see notes on chap. xiii.), they may be here designated by this name. **chief captains,** or military tribunes, Gr. chiliarchs (R.V. marg.), would then be the Roman officials in the province, who would be of military rank. The rich and the strong, the bond and the free, are comprehensive terms meant to include all.

Upon every rank the terror lay. The rich could not purchase exemption, nor the strong defy the assault of these great world-forces.

16. 'Even the swift agony of being crushed to death is preferable to being left face to face with the indignation of an outraged God' (Moffatt). Note the striking paradox, **the wrath of the Lamb.**

17. **for the great day.** See Mal. iii. 2. **to stand,** *i.e.* 'to face quietly the judgment of God' (Moffatt).

Visions of Safety and Blessedness.

Chap. vii. We should naturally expect the opening of the seventh seal to follow immediately on the sixth. But in

pursuit of his practical purpose the writer breaks in upon his narration of the course of events with two visions which are designed to bring home to his readers truths which it is of the utmost importance for them to have continually before them. The convulsions of nature and society would raise in their minds the question upon which chap. vi. ends: 'Who is able to stand?' And the seals already opened were to be followed by another of still more terrible aspect, which was to be the real trial of their faithfulness. In chap. vii. the seer anticipates their anxiety. He turns aside from the straight line of his scheme to comfort his companions in tribulation, by assuring them not only of security, but also of ultimate victory and blessedness. For the place of these visions in the Book, see Introduction, Sect. II.

The chapter contains two visions, each setting forth a single idea.

1. In late Jewish thought the forces of nature were regarded as under the control of angels (cf. angel of the waters, xvi. 15; angel of the fire, xiv. 18). **Any tree.** This touch reflects the value that was put upon trees and the care that was taken for their preservation in time of war.

2. **another angel,** *i.e.* a fifth. *the east*, R.V. **the sunrising,** was the quarter from which hope and deliverance would naturally be expected to come. **having the seal of the living God.** The seal or signet-ring of Oriental rulers was the symbol of delegated authority. Therefore all that this angel did had the authority of God behind it. **great voice,** *i.e.* of authority. See note on ver. 10. **to whom it was given to hurt,** etc. They were angels of judgment whose function it was to pour out destruction upon the coming antichrist. But after the sealing we hear no more of them. The judgment upon antichrist comes in another way. They stand for a clear assertion that judgment will fall.

3. **till we shall have sealed.** The idea of sealing or setting a mark upon one so as to ward off an evil force is probably taken from Ezek. ix. 4 ff., where the man with the ink-horn is commanded to go through the city and put a mark upon the foreheads of all

those who mourn over its abominations, so that those to whom is given the commission to destroy shall not touch them. To be sealed, then, is to have the assurance of God's protection. Early in the history of the Church the name 'seal' was given to the ordinance of baptism. **the servants of our God,** those who are known by God as His. **on their foreheads.** The mark was to be conspicuous to all. We have here the paradox that runs throughout the entire Book, that the mark which was to call down the world's hostility was the guarantee by God Himself that they would pass unscathed through the fiery trial; while the mark of the beast, which procured for his followers escape in this world, sealed them for destruction at the hand of God.

The main thought in these verses is the assurance of the safety of the faithful amid the coming tribulation. The holding of the hands of the ministers of judgment till the safety of the righteous should be secured was a common apocalyptic tradition. Thus in the Book of Enoch the angels that had charge over the waters were commanded to stay their hands and not let them rise in flood till the ark should be prepared. But a further idea lies in the passage. The presence of the servants of God procures for the world a respite from the Judgment that would otherwise be immediate. So in our Lord's parable the presence of the wheat gains for the tares a respite. This thought is beautifully brought out in Keble's poem on 'All Saints' Day.'

4–8. The vision of the sealed.

4. **I heard the number of them which were sealed.** The actual sealing is not witnessed by the seer; it is not required to be seen, for nothing depends on the mere act. The assertion of the fact is sufficient to excite in the mind the desired response of confidence in God. **one hundred and forty and four thousand** denotes completeness; while the enumeration of Israel tribe by tribe gives the impression that deliberate care has been taken to secure completeness.

5–8. In this list of the tribes the following peculiarities occur,

1. Judah is put first in place of Levi, who in purely Jewish writings had generally come to be named first. This may be due to Christian influence. 'Our Lord came out of Judah.' 2. Dan is omitted, and Manasseh, though the grandson of Jacob, is substituted for him. In Jewish theology Dan was the tribe from which it was supposed that the antichrist was to spring.

One cannot fail to be struck with the difference between the Jewish atmosphere of this passage and the Roman provincial spirit that pervades the greater part of the Book. Various ways of explaining this difference have been adopted by commentators. The simplest and most satisfactory explanation seems to be, that in this passage we have a quotation from an earlier book which the writer has drawn into his service because it contained and set forth the precise lesson that he wished to teach. At a former time of imminent trial some old Jewish writer had assured God's people of safety under the prophetic symbol of the sealing of the tribes. And the N.T. seer employs the old bit of writing to carry home the truth, that God's promise of protection to His people in the past is valid for them in the tribulation of these latter days. There are other passages in the Book whose presence is most satisfactorily accounted for on the same hypothesis.

Yet the writer uses this bit of ancient literature in no slavish way, but with the greatest freedom and naturalness. The stately enumeration of the tribes would linger in the memory till it almost ceased to be recognised as derived from another source. He brings himself into the vision as a spectator and an auditor (cf. I saw, I heard). It is not a mere quotation, but a living scene in his soul's experience.

If this explanation is adopted there is no necessity to attempt an answer to a question upon which a great deal of hopeless thought has been expended: 'Do the 144,000 represent Jewish Christians only, or are Gentiles to be included?' The writer is thinking neither of Jew nor Gentile, but of certain ideas that he finds enshrined in the passage. These ideas are election, safety,

completeness. All who are God's are divinely strengthened, so that they shall be able to stand against any manifestation of Satanic power. When God shall have gathered in His elect, not one shall be missing.

The second part of the chapter vers. 9-17 takes a still higher range. In a vision of the blessedness of the victorious martyrs, of unparalleled sublimity and power, the seer makes appeal to the imagination of his readers. With the sure instinct of unconscious art, every idea, phrase, word, and symbol is chosen to intensify the impression which he desires to produce. The vision is made up of sensuous features, yet so refined and sublimated as to convey the purest and loftiest spiritual ideas. The purpose of the vision is to awaken an aspiration to be of the number of the victorious martyrs which will stimulate to follow in their footsteps.

9. **After these things.** This formula shows that the writer is advancing to a new idea. **a great multitude . . . number.** He tries to counteract the depression that was apt to arise from the fact that his readers belonged to a little flock, by the assurance that faithfulness made them one with all who had suffered and would still suffer for righteousness' sake throughout the ages. They might, if they would, be soldiers in 'the noble army of martyrs.'

out of every nation, and of all tribes and peoples and tongues. 'This favourite formula found a daily illustration in the polyglot cosmopolitan crowd who jostled one another in the agora or on the quays of the Asian seaport towns' (Swete). **standing before the throne and before the Lamb.** To stand before a king meant to be one of his court and to enjoy his favour. *clothed* **in white robes, R.V. arrayed.** For the significance of *arrayed* see note on iii. 5, as also for the meaning of white robes in Jewish thought. **palms** represent victory or festivity, according as the symbol is taken in a Greek or a Jewish sense. Deissmann says that the imagery of the latter part of this verse is taken from the religious processions in the neighbourhood of Ephesus, in which

those who took part walked 'clothed in white, and crowned with leafy boughs, and holding a branch in their hands.'

10. **with a great voice.** Different meanings must be given to the phrase *great voice*, according to circumstances. Over and over again angels speak with a great voice, signifying authority. The great voice of the souls beneath the altar signifies the intensity of their longing. Here the great voice signifies the exuberance of the praise. **Salvation**, rather, 'the salvation.' *The salvation* which has been attained through suffering is meant.

While in chap. v. the redeemed creation is the last to take up the song of salvation, in this chapter they are the first. This suggests the distinction between the world in process of being saved and the world where salvation is an accomplished fact. Man is slower than the angels to take in the glory of Christ's sacrifice; but when his eyes have been opened, he regards it with a more glowing and enthusiastic appreciation.

11, 12. The angels take up the song of praise to God. Each noun in the original has the article.

The most significant feature of the song of the angels is the omission of salvation. They sing only as they know.

13–17. The seer still further seeks to intensify the impression on the emotions of his readers through making emphatic by 'a celestial mode of catechetical instruction' that the white-robed, palm-bearing multitude have reached their state of blessedness by the same road by which Christ had passed to His glory.

13. **one of the elders answered.** No question had been asked; but wonder and longing for knowledge were written on the seer's face. So with Dante, *Paradiso*, IV. 10–12.

The question of the elder is the seer's own wondering thought and that of his readers rendered articulate. It is for their sakes as well as for his that the explanation takes the form of question and answer. A question sometimes has the force of a *nota bene*, summoning the attention and evoking interest. Note the arrestingness of the inverted order in the R.V.: **Those which**

are arrayed in the white robes, who are they, and whence came they? The white robes were a feature that caught the eye.

14. *said*, R.V. **say**, Gr. have said (marg.). The perfect tense of the original is perhaps intended to suggest that the condition of the human mind implied in the seer's answer—inability to conceive how out of such a conflict as that of earth there could issue such a glory as that of heaven—is a constant one. *Sir*, R.V. **My Lord. thou knowest.** Thou is emphatic—'Not I, but thou.' **these are they which** *came*, R.V. **come.** The timeless participle has the force of a substantive. Cf. 'them that come victorious from the beast' (xv. 2). **the great tribulation.** Every age has its conflict that can be called pre-eminently the great tribulation; and from that conflict there are always those that come victorious and who go to swell the great multitude which no man can number. **they washed their robes . . . Lamb.** This clause does not bear the meaning that modern evangelicalism has often given it—obtained pardon and cleansing from sin through the death of Christ. For the atoning work of Christ this writer uses other expressions (loosed us from our sins, didst purchase unto God by Thy blood), and the agency is always attributed to Christ Himself. In this Book (see notes on chap. v. 10) the supreme result of Christ's sacrifice is not the justification but the victory of the redeemed. The white robes symbolise victory, and the blood of the Lamb is the means by which the victory is obtained. The martyrs are not only recipients of the benefits of Christ's sufferings; they are also partakers of the sufferings of Christ. They enter the battle after Him; and, having come through the conflict, they obtain the white robes of victory.

15. **Therefore** is emphatic. **they are before the throne of God,** in the fulness of joy of His presence. **serve Him day and night.** The unceasing service is a priestly service. The sacrificial service on earth is continued in the sacrificial service of Heaven; but the heavenly conditions make it free from all suffering. The presence of God is the guarantee of freedom from all the evils that they have experienced in this life.

16, 17. Perhaps there is no passage in the whole of literature that so combines simplicity of language and sublimity of thought as these two verses. The differences of the R.V. from the Authorised represent a more correct text, but the beautiful and familiar language of the latter will probably continue to hold the affections. The verses are full of reminiscences of the O.T.

Still the seer has not yet reached the full, clear vision of the perfected life. He can for the most part describe it only in negatives. It will be free from those things that make life on earth hard. Hunger, thirst, the heat of the scorching sirocco, shall trouble no more. The Lamb **shall be their shepherd,** providing them with food, and leading them *unto living fountains of waters* (R.V. **fountains of the water of life**). And the removal of all sorrow from the life is symbolised in the words, **God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.**

THE TRUMPETS. VIII

Chap. viii. Following the visions of chap. vii. comes the opening of the seventh seal, in which there is a departure from the scheme of the former six. Each of these stood for a single phenomenon or element of history; but the seventh unfolds itself in a new sevenfold series of phenomena, of narrower scope, but of more urgent significance.

1. *there was* **silence in heaven,** R.V. **there followed.** The voices of heaven ceased in order that, as the episode that follows suggests, the prayers of the saints might be heard. The Talmud says that in the fifth heaven there are angels who sing by night and are silent by day, in order that the praises of Israel may be heard. 'The needs of the weakest saints on earth concern God more than the psalmody of the highest orders of the heavenly hosts' (Charles).

The unwonted cessation of the praises of heaven would kindle the expectancy and quicken the attention of the seer. His mind would be prepared for the emergence of new revelations to his

sight. **about the space of half an hour**, probably means a short definite period.

2. **the seven angels which** *stood*, R.V. **stand.** This idea of the angels of the presence is a conventional religious one, and may to some extent have taken shape from the practice of an Oriental court (Esth. i. 14). **there were given unto them seven trumpets.** This is not to be pressed to mean that the seer saw the trumpets actually given into their hands. The idea intended to be presented is that God's ministers of Judgment already stand prepared against the time when His will shall be no longer delayed.

3–5. The time for the answering of the prayers of the saints has come. We have here a marked instance of how in this Book the imagery is continually sacrificed to the ideas. Silence has been proclaimed in heaven that the prayers of the saints may come up before God with acceptance. We should therefore expect the offering of the prayers to be in terms of sound; in reality they are offered in terms of sight and smell.

3. **another angel.** That angels presented the prayers of the saints was a common religious idea. See Tob. xii 15. Here the presentation takes the form of adding incense to them. In later Jewish practice incense was an important part of sacrifice, and even the sacrifices of the patriarchs were supposed to have proved acceptable through incense. Thus the Book of Jubilees attributes to Enoch, Noah, and Abraham a most elaborate incense ritual. The idea seems to be that the sweet-smelling incense made God find delight in the sacrifice, and accept it. So the adding of incense to the prayers of the saints that are lying as an offering on the altar suggests the spiritual idea that they so coincide with the will of God that He will be able to grant them. *at the altar* is better than **over the altar** of the R.V. The altar is the altar of incense, but with elements that suggest the altar of burnt-offering. The golden censer and the gift of much incense (cf. note on ver. 2) were the insignia of the angel's office. *offer it with*, R.V. **add it to**, literally, 'give it

to.' **the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar.** The whole phrase seems to indicate that the saints spoken of here are not Christian martyrs only, but all God's faithful ones in the struggles of all the ages. This is the seer's way not only of impressing upon his readers the value of prayer in the present crisis, but of bringing home to them that they have on their behalf all the supplications of all the saints of all times. By comparing this verse with v. 8 we see how freely the writer moves among his imagery. Here, incense is added to the prayers of the saints ; there, the incense is the prayers of the saints. But perhaps the latter passage is a prosaic gloss by a later hand.

5. This verse gives an epitome of the effect on the earth of the sounding of the trumpets. The results of the prayers of God's people are judgments on the earth.

The time is now ripe for the disclosure of the new series of phenomena that unfold themselves out of the seventh seal. A study of these brings out certain features which help us to understand the writer's meaning. 1. He has in view facts in the life of the Empire whose outlines are also drawn by secular historians. Decaying productiveness of the land, declining fisheries and commerce, vices that were sapping the moral strength, the Parthian Terror looming on the Eastern horizon, as well as other evils to which we have lost the key, pointed to the fact that something was rotten in the State. 2. The writer approaches these facts not as a historian or a scientist would, seeking their explanation and their remedy in forces that operated on the same plane as themselves. He looks at them as a prophet. To him they are manifestations of the mind of God. He attributes them, not to natural, but to transcendental causes. And these he describes by such imagery as conveyed to the religious mind the impression of Judgments sent by God. 3. The distinctive conception lying at the heart of this series of judgments is seen, (*a*) in the name 'trumpets,' (*b*) in the scope of their operation, and (*c*) in the summing up of the result. (*a*) By the use of the image 'trumpets' some kind of summons is clearly

meant; and though the name itself does not determine the nature of this summons, the other points plainly suggest that the trumpet-calls are voices of warning, calling to repentance. This is shown in (*b*) the limited scope of the operation of the judgments. They are limited in their incidence. But they are meant and are sufficient to show what will be the inevitable result of sin universally, if it is not repented of and forsaken. And (*c*) as the trumpet-series is about to reach its culmination in such a way as to open out into another series at the heart of which lies a totally different idea, the writer sums up their result in these words: 'And the rest of mankind, which were not killed with these plagues, repented not of the works of their hands,' etc. (ix. 20). Plainly, then, the aim of the trumpet-judgments was to manifest the result of sin in some (a third part), and thus to awaken to repentance those whom the judgment passed by for the time.

6. **prepared themselves to sound.** They had been holding the trumpets in their hands, but now they raise them to their lips—a graphic and realistic touch.

The first four trumpets (7–12). In these four judgments both thought and language are drawn from the account of the plagues of Egypt, though the way in which up-to-date traits are added shows the freedom with which the old story is handled. It was natural that to the mind of a Jew the old historic symbols should arise in representing the warnings of God to men; all the more that the plagues of Egypt were not less calls to repentance than punishments.

The first trumpet (ver. 7). The first angel sounded his trumpet, with the result that the productiveness of the land was blighted as by a destructive hailstorm. Many causes were working together for the diminution of fertility. Nor were efforts lacking on the part of rulers to try to stem the tide. (See note on vi. 6.) But the prophet, disregarding all mundane causes of this blight, attributes it to the direct agency of God under the symbol of a hailstorm.

7. **hail and fire** (see Ex. ix. 23–24, the seventh plague). Fire is, of course, lightning. Dr. George Adam Smith says: 'Hail is common, and is often mingled with rain and thunderstorms, which happen at intervals through the winter, and are frequent in Spring' (*Hist. Geo.*, p. 64). How great may be the destructiveness of a single hailstorm to fields almost ready for the sickle is not unknown in our own days, *e.g.* in Canada. **mingled with blood** is an addition to the original Egyptian plague, and may be based on some natural phenomenon. **the third part of the earth was burnt up**, is admitted by the R.V. on the authority of the best MSS. Dr. Moffatt says that 'the third' is a primitive Semitic division. Farrar thinks that by the third part is to be understood the Roman Empire. That all the green grass was burnt up, while only a third of the trees were burnt up, may have been suggested by some actual event within the knowledge of the writer and his readers.

The second trumpet (ver. 8 f.). Corresponding to the blight upon the land, there is a diminishing of the resources of the sea, its fisheries and maritime commerce.

8. **as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea**, may have been suggested by the Mediterranean volcanoes, some of which were visible from Patmos, *e.g.* Thera (Santorin), which was in eruption during the first century. But it is more probable that the image is drawn from Jewish writings, or from Jer. li. 25, though the burnt mountain of Jeremiah destroys not the sea, but all the earth. **the third part of the sea became blood.** In the eruption of 1573 the sea round Thera was tinted for 20 miles round; and even when the submarine volcano is quiescent, 'the sea in the immediate vicinity of the cone is of a brilliant orange colour, from the action of oxide of iron' (Moffatt). The death of the fish might be due to some poisonous substance. For this judgment compare Ex. vii. 17–21. But in Egyptian times the Nile was the great waterway; in Greek and Roman, the Mediterranean. The catastrophe is also brought up to date by the destruction of shipping.

The third trumpet (vers. 9–11). The rivers and the fountains of water yielding an element absolutely essential to the existence of life become bitter and poisonous. The vehicle of this judgment is a great star falling from heaven, burning like a torch.

In the Egyptian plague the waters are turned into blood, so that the Egyptians loathed to drink of them (see Ex. vii. 18 ff.), and all the waters of Egypt were affected by the plague; here, the waters are made bitter and poisonous, like the waters of Marah (Ex. xv. 23 ff.).

11. **the name of the star . . . Wormwood.** This is probably an addition by a later hand. **the third part of the waters became wormwood.** Wormwood was a bitter kind of wood of the species Artemisia. 'The excessive dread which the Hebrews had of most bitter substances was founded not on clinical experience, but on prejudice. Camels, at least, eat more or less of the species of Artemisia' (Hastings' *D.B.* iv. 941).

It is impossible to conjecture with any degree of certainty what contemporary influence John had in view in this plague.

But every age has its own trumpet-peals; and it is in drawing its attention to them that this old piece of literature renews its practical power in the life of man. When, *e.g.*, literature becomes corrupt, it carries moral poison into the very springs of character.

The fourth trumpet (12). Judgment upon the heavens alone is lacking to make the visitation of the trumpet-plagues universal; so the fourth trumpet ushers in the smiting of a third part of the sun and the moon and the stars. Among the Egyptian plagues was one of darkness (Ex. x. 21–23). But the occurrence of eclipses of the sun and moon probably suggested the choice of the mode of judgment here. There seems no apparent connection between the cause and the effect, the eclipsing of the third part of the luminaries, and the shortening of the day and the illumined night by a third. By a series of ingenious conjectures Dr. Charles arrives at the following reconstruction of the line: 'And the third of them shone not by day nor by

night likewise.' But it may be doubted whether the reading that we have is not the original one. The writer is less concerned with the consistency of his imagery than with the setting forth of his ideas. And the judgment consists in the diminution of light.

This plague has been understood by some interpreters, *e.g.* Farrar, in a political sense, as referring to the confusion wrought in the Empire through the cutting off of so many emperors and chieftains by assassination.

13. *I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven*, R.V. reads **eagle**, 'one eagle.' This picture of the single eagle flying in mid-heaven and proclaiming in a voice that all must hear, is the writer's impressive way of calling attention to the more ominous significance of the plagues that were about to be announced. It was by an eagle that Baruch sent a letter to the nine and a half tribes of the captivity. It is strength of wing and speed of flight that seem to determine the choice of an eagle. But while the eagle may have been a common apocalyptic messenger, there could hardly fail to rise to the minds of the readers the thought of the standard of the Roman cohorts. Wherever the Roman eagles flew, they carried Rome's will. God's single eagle proclaims His will.

The fifth trumpet (ix. 1–12). A star fallen from heaven to the earth receives the key of the abyss from which issues a cloud of locusts.

1. *I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth*, R.V. **a star from heaven fallen unto the earth.** 'Like a star disorbed.' A star fallen from heaven was a conventional apocalyptic image for the fall of an angel. **unto the earth,** *i.e.* to have the sphere of his influence and operations upon the earth. *to him was given the key of the bottomless pit*, R.V. **the pit of the abyss.** The earth was conceived as resting upon an abyss of waters, and between the upper world and the lower was a pit or shaft or well called the pit or well of the abyss. The abyss, which first meant

the tumultuous waters on which the earth rested, afterwards came to mean a chasm of fire which was the prison of the angels. In the Book of Revelation it has come to mean the place in which all forms of evil are imprisoned, and whence they are let loose upon the earth. In it Satan is to be bound during the millennium, to issue forth again to engage in a new campaign of tempting men to resist God (see chap. xx.).

2. **he opened the pit of the abyss.** In this imagery the seer traces the origin of evil in the world to a deliberate act of Satan. The fallen star opens the pit of the abyss from which, as from Pandora's box, all forms of evil issue. The Book of Enoch and apocalypses generally ascribe the origin of evil on the earth to the angels who, according to Gen. vi., came down to earth and consorted with the daughters of men.

When the door of the pit of the abyss is opened there rises from it a pillar of smoke, such as in the *Arabian Nights* sometimes issues from an opened vessel and takes the form of a Jinnee. But the cloud of smoke may consist of the dense swarms of the locusts. Travellers have so described them.

3, 4. The smoke that issued from the abyss took the form of hosts of demonic beings, like locusts in their form and flight, but like scorpions in their function. They were not to destroy vegetation, but were to torment men who had not the seal of God upon their foreheads. **scorpions of the earth,** *i.e.* common, natural scorpions. *those men which have not*, R.V. **such men as have not.** It is a distinction based on character. This phrase, as descriptive of God's people, points back to vii. 3 ff. Thus there is gradually coming into sharper relief the contrast between those who have the seal of God and those who have the mark of the beast. The lack of the seal of God leaves men open to have the mark of the beast stamped upon them. The antagonism between them at length becomes complete.

5. The limitation put upon the exercise of the function of the scorpion-locusts is in harmony with the other trumpet-plagues that have preceded. They are not to inflict a final doom. They are

not to kill, but only to torment for a limited period. The idea of warning, summoning to repentance, is thus maintained. **five months.** This stands for an indefinite but limited period. The period is probably chosen as that (April to August) during which locusts are specially destructive and dangerous.

their torment . . . man. 'Scorpions were a natural symbol for vicious and dangerous opponents whose attacks were always painful and might be mortal' (Moffatt).

6. **shall seek death, and shall in no wise find it.** The pain of the torment of the scorpion-locusts is seen in the fact that men will seek relief from it by death. In the first century suicide was very common among the Romans, but did not find favour with Jews. With this desire for death contrast the 'strait betwixt two' of Paul (Phil. i. 23).

7–10. The description of the scorpion-locusts is probably suggested by actual features in the appearance of scorpions and locusts. Their shapes were like unto horses prepared for war. So Joel ii. 4. What the crown of spurious value meant it is impossible to say. The horror of their appearance was all the greater that, along with their demonic function, their faces had the appearance of men's. Their long antennæ, like the hair of women, perhaps suggested the witchery of temptation; while their teeth, like the teeth of lions, suggested their murderous cruelty. Unlike locusts, and like scorpions, they had stings in their tails with which to perform their function of torturing men. The Arabs have a common proverb that locusts are similar in head to the horse, in breast to the lion, in feet to the camel, in body to the snake, in tail to the scorpion, in feelers to the hair of a maiden. (Niebuhr, quoted by Bleek.)

11. **They have over them as king.** In this, too, the demon-locusts differ from the locusts of the earth as popularly conceived (Prov. xxx. 27). They have over them as king the angel of the abyss. **Abaddon** in the O.T. is a synonym for Sheol, and is generally translated in the LXX. by the Greek word meaning 'destruction.' In this passage it is personified to stand for the

angel of the abyss, the arch-demon. The Greek name **Apollyon,** the destroyer, is used as synonymous with Abaddon. The locusts partake of the nature of their king. As it is his nature to destroy, so is it theirs.

Ver. 12 is an impressive statement by which special attention is called to the importance of the plagues that are to follow.

The sixth trumpet 13-21. Eastern Invasion, the Parthian Terror.

13, 14. A voice from the golden altar of incense commands to loose the four angels that are bound at the river Euphrates. The Euphrates was in general the recognised boundary between the Roman and the Parthian Empires. The loosing of the angels meant that Divine permission was given to the barbarian hordes to rush in upon the eastern provinces, to which such an occurrence might well appear to be 'the end of all things.'

In addition to angels of the presence, and angels set over the powers of nature, and angels of the nations, we have angels whose function it is to superintend the forces of history by which God is bringing His judgments upon the guilty Empire.

15. **prepared for the hour and day and month and year** is an emphatic way of expressing precise time. All the forces of God's purpose are ready, waiting till the set time arrives. **the third part of men.** This, too, is in harmony with all the other trumpets. The third part are slain that the rest may take warning and repent.

16. The angels of judgment become concrete in a body of Parthian cavalry. **Two hundred millions** was a symbol for innumerable hosts. The statement, **I heard the number of them,** emphasises the greatness and the certainty of the deluge.

17. Terror-smitten imagination probably considerably magnified the physical qualities of the Parthian warriors. The mingled colours of their armour, 'fiery-red, smoky-blue, and sulphurous-yellow,' rendered their appearance still more terrible. The horses were magnified to fire-breathing monsters with heads like the heads of lions.

18. Still the judgment is partial. In the midst of wrath God remembers mercy.

19. This description of the power that is in the tails of the horses may have reference to the custom which the Parthians followed of tying their horses' tails into a knot, and also to their expertness with the bow when they were retreating as well as when they were advancing. But the verse has much of the appearance of an interpolated explanation ; and ver. 20 follows 18 most naturally.

The Little Book—A New Revelation.

Chap. x. This chapter may be regarded as a hinge or clasp binding the two sections of the Book together. In itself it adds nothing to the progress of the argument ; but its function is not therefore unimportant. Hitherto the seer has had his eyes upon the more general aspects of contemporary life. But he has now reached the special phase of the situation which bore upon the lives of the Christians of Asia. It was a situation that was making great demands upon their faith ; and in order to strengthen them to rise to the demands, he gives them assurance of the trustworthiness of the message that he brings to them by asserting that it came to him by special revelation of God. In the same way as the Divine enlightenment had of old come to Ezekiel, so had it come to him.

1. The messenger of the new revelation. **another strong angel** is sent from heaven as having a weighty message to bear. He descended from heaven, the source of every reliable revelation. He was **arrayed with a cloud**, for all revelation is a mystery. The **rainbow** encircled his head like a halo, suggesting the glory, perhaps the faithfulness, of God. **His face was as the sun**, symbolising majesty and clearness. **His feet** were **as pillars of fire**, indicating strength and surety.

2. **he had in his hand a little book open.** The book is called a little book, as dealing with a narrower issue than the former.

The book is open, indicating that his soul has been quickened to apprehend God's purpose.

3 ff. At the cry of the angel the seven thunders uttered their voices, and the seer was about to write their utterances, showing that to him they were articulate. But a voice from heaven bids him seal up what they uttered.

Can we reach a reason which explains satisfactorily the omission of the thunder-series of judgments and at the same time justifies the mention of them? The thunders would be a more solemn and awesome series of judgments than those associated with the trumpets, but yet of the same nature and having the same purpose as they—to warn men and summon them to repentance. Now the command to seal up the utterances of the thunders conveys the intimation that the time for warning and repentance is past. There was a time in the history of the Empire when more earnest warning might have been effectual, but that time has gone. Something has happened in its life that made further warning useless, so that nothing now remains but to take it out of the way.

5 f. This interpretation is borne out by vers. 5, 6, where it is stated in the most impressive manner that there is to be no more delay in the fulfilment of the purpose of God. **lifted up his right hand to heaven.** The angel swears by Him who is infinitely greater than himself, thus pledging God to the truth of his message. The sonorous periphrasis for God is singularly impressive. **that there shall be time no longer.** Though the R.V. retains the translation *time* in the text, it puts the correct rendering, 'delay,' in the margin. Thus there was brought home to the suffering Christians the comforting thought that their sufferings were the swift-passing throes of the struggle through which God was bringing His purpose to fulfilment and leading them to victory and glory.

7. **the mystery of God** is the whole purpose of God, now hidden, but about to be revealed, of which the sufferings of the Church were an element.

8. The sentence in the original begins with **voice** in the nomi-

native, as if the writer meant to write, 'The voice which I heard from heaven spoke again.' But he breaks in with the accusative, making it necessary to insert **I heard**, as in the R.V. The broken constructions in the Book are often very telling. The voice is that of ver. 4, which not only tells the seer what he is not to take as a revelation, but also directs him to a new revelation. **Go, take the book.** What he was to give as a revelation to his readers was first of all to be a revelation to himself. He was their brother in tribulation, and he needed comfort as truly as they. They would be the more ready to listen to a word to which he could bear witness as having 'found' himself.

9. **Take it, and eat it up.** Cf. Ezek. ii. 8. A hand thrusts the book towards Ezekiel; while John is told to go and take it out of the angel's hand. It was an unwelcome task to the O.T. prophet to receive and transmit a message of woe to his people; but to this prophet the revelation was welcome and acceptable, because it meant the triumph of God's cause.

10. The seer enters upon a new stage of prophetic consciousness. Devouring the words of any one signifies receiving them eagerly and appropriating them to oneself. See Jer. xv. 16. In this symbolic way does the writer tell how God's thoughts became his; how, through his awakened and inspired intelligence, God's revelation came to him.

11. *he said*, R.V. **they say**, *i.e.* 'I was told.' The significance of his message was not to be exhausted by the circumstances of those to whom he wrote. His prophecy was not of any private interpretation. While the message was primarily sent to the Christians of Asia, it was to be applicable to all nations in similar circumstances. **Thou must.** 'Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is me if I preach not the gospel.'

VISIONS OF COMFORT.

Again, as at the close of chap. vi., the writer has reached a stage in his exposition when great demands are to be made upon the

endurance of his readers. And he turns aside from the course of his theme to reinforce their courage by restating the truths that were contained in the interlude of chap. vii. He asserts that what is kept sacred to God will be preserved inviolate. And he gives what may be called the 'natural history of witness-bearing,' not disguising the truth that they who would share in the glory of Christ must be prepared to meet death for their testimony. His followers must pass through tribulation for the same reason that Christian had to pass through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, 'because the way to the Celestial City lay through the midst of it.'

To enforce these truths the writer makes use of previous writings in which are embodied the lessons that he wishes to teach. This accounts for the marked Jewish colouring of the passage, so different from the Roman provincial atmosphere of the bulk of his treatise.

Chap. xi. 1. This verse is very broken in construction. *And the angel stood* of A.V. is to be omitted, having been introduced probably from Zech. ii. 3. The literal translation is, 'And there was given unto me a reed like unto a rod, saying,' or, 'while it was said, Arise.' This impersonal use of the participle is common in Hebrew. **reed** or 'measuring-reed.' The stronger kinds of reeds were used for measuring, and the Greek calamus acquired a technical significance and fixed length, 6⅔ cubits, or about 9 feet. **Rise, and measure,** 'Up, and measure' (Moffatt). The symbol of measurement is used in the Bible in three senses: 1. With a view to building or rebuilding Zech. ii. 1–4). 2. With a view to destruction (2 Kings xxi. 12 f.). 3. With a view to preservation in peril and deliverance out of threatening destruction (2 Sam. viii. 2). Ver. 2 shows that here the third sense is meant. What is measured is to be preserved inviolate, while what is not measured is to be given over to profanation. **temple.** The word is here used in the sense of the most sacred shrine, the Holy of Holies. The shrine and the altar and those

that worship therein has the force of a composite phrase summing up the portion of the people faithful to God.

2. the court which is without the temple. The outer court, which is left for profanation, would represent Christians who should fail to stand in the coming trial. Ezekiel's temple had an outer court (x. 5), but the one here spoken of is the court of the Gentiles in Herod's temple. **leave without.** Dr Milligan points out that the word so translated bears the much stronger meaning, 'cast out' (see marg. A.V. and R.V.), and takes this to be a command to pronounce formal excommunication upon those who, having once been the servants of Christ, have succumbed to the temptation to apostatise. There is no doubt that the passage is meant to bring home the lesson that those who fail are God-forsaken. **given unto the nations,** *i.e.* to work their wicked will upon it. It had made the great surrender. **the holy city.** The original writing had in view the material city; but as employed by this writer, the symbol stands for the sacred community. **tread under foot,** *i.e.* profane. **forty and two months** is a conventional apocalyptic period of time, expressed in various forms. In Dan. vii. 25, xii. 7 it is spoken of as 'a time, and times and half a time,' *i.e.* $3\frac{1}{2}$ years, or 42 months, or 1260 days. In Luke xxi. 24 it is called 'the times of the Gentiles.' Originally it covered the duration of the sufferings of the Jews under Antiochus Epiphanes, June 168–Dec. 165 or Dec. 168–middle of 164. By comparing various passages in this Book (xii. 14, xi. 2, 3, xiii. 5), it may be seen that the duration of the triumph of the Gentiles (42 months (xi. 2)) = the duration of the prophesying of the two witnesses (1260 days (xi. 3)) = the duration of the woman's sojourn in the wilderness (1260 days, and a time and times and half a time (xii. 6, 24)) = the duration of the blasphemies of Rome (42 months (xiii. 5)). This synchronism helps us to the interpretation to be put upon these symbols.

This passage has a perennial application. Whatever department of life is not kept sacred to God is liable to become the prey of evil; for it is omitted from the protecting covenant.

The two witnesses, vers. 3–13.

That this is taken from a different original from that of the former verse is shown by the following arguments: 1. There is an abruptness and a certain degree of awkwardness in the transition from 2 to 3. Note the change to the first person in ver. 3. 2. The leading ideas in the two passages are different. 3. The spirit of the one section is ritualistic, of the other, prophetic. 4. The same periods of time are expressed in different forms—42 months and 1260 days. 5. The time during which evil shall have sway, is described in different terms in the two sections—the treading of the Holy City under foot, and the prophesying of the two witnesses in sackcloth. 6. Jerusalem is spoken of in the one as 'the holy city,' and in the other as 'the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt.' 7. In the former passage the Gentiles are hostile to the Jews: in the latter passage the Jews have recourse to the Gentiles to rid them of their enemies.

3. **And I will give power unto my two witnesses.** There is no word for power in the Greek. Probably in the original writing the construction was somewhat like the reading of the A.V. marg.: 'I will give unto my two witnesses that they may prophesy'; but the original construction has been thrown out of gear in introducing the quotation. **My two witnesses.** These have been thought by some to be Elijah and Enoch, or Elijah and Moses. But there is no solid ground of conjecture. The original Jewish or Christian writing told of two servants of God, who suffered martyrdom in a time of religious declension. If ver. 8*b* belongs to the original writing, the two witnesses would be Christian martyrs. But it is more likely that the clause is an interpolation. **prophesy** or testify for God, proclaim His will, preach His gospel. For the **1260 days** see note on ver. 2. **clothed in sackcloth.** Sackcloth was a species of coarse haircloth, the garb of mourners, and of prophets, who bore upon their hearts 'the weary weight of all this unintelligible world.'

4. This verse has all the appearance of being an interpolated

explanation by some learned scribe. The original reference of ver. 4 is to the vision of Zechariah, in which the two 'sons of oil' are Zerubbabel and Joshua, the civil and the religious heads of the nation. But there is nothing to show that Zerubbabel and Joshua underwent martyrdom. On the whole, then, it is better to regard this verse as an interpolated explanation.

5, 6. The ministry of the witnesses.

will hurt them, R.V. **desireth to hurt them.** This implies deliberate opposition. **must he be killed,** *i.e.* according to the purpose of God.

The Divine authority of their mission is shown—1. By the destruction by fire of persistent enemies, as happened in the case of Elijah (2 Kings i. 10 ff.), of Moses (Num. xvi. 35). But in the present case the fire does not fall from heaven, but proceeds from their mouths. This may be a graphic way of saying that their preaching wrought conviction. See Jer. v. 14. 2. By their power over the natural forces of the earth, *e.g.* to withhold rain (1 Kings xvii. 1), to turn water into blood (Ex. vii. 19–21), to send plague upon the earth (1 Sam. iv. 8).

The martyrdom of the witnesses (7–10).

7. **And when they shall have finished their testimony.** 'Man is immortal till his work is done' (cf. Luke xiii. 31 ff.). **the beast that cometh up out of the abyss.** This is the first mention of one of the leading agents in the second part of the Book.

8. **the great city,** *i.e.* Jerusalem. **which spiritually is called.** The force of the relative is 'which being what it is.' It almost signifies 'which deserves to be called.' **Spiritually** means symbolically or allegorically. **Sodom.** Jerusalem is called Sodom in Isa. i. 10. The city is further identified as the place where their Lord was crucified. This clause sounds like an addition either by the author of Revelation, or by some Christian expounder. The insertion of 'also' gives it the appearance of a postscript. Surely if it were original, so important a particular would not have been tacked on by a mere also. It would have been made central, as being the head and front of her offending.

9. The unburied bodies of the witnesses of God are allowed to lie in the open streets (cf. Ps. lxxix. 2). Among the Greeks great importance was attached to sepulture. In the *Iliad* fierce battles are fought for possession of the bodies of slain heroes. One of the most beautiful of Greek plays, the *Antigone* of Sophocles, turns upon the burial of a rebel leader by his sister, in obedience to divine law, and in defiance of the edict of the king. It was a great indignity in ancient times to be denied burial. But perhaps it is not indignity that is meant to be conveyed here, but that the victory of the beast was conspicuous to all. This thing was not done in a corner. **three and a half days** is an indefinite time; cf. $3\frac{1}{2}$ years.

10. Joy and exultation fill the breasts of all at the removal of the troublers of their peace, and the occasion is counted worthy of the exchange of gifts, the Eastern way of mutual congratulation. **tormented.** Conscience echoed the word of the prophets, and tortured the impenitent people.

The vindication of the witnesses (11–13).

11. The joy of the people is shortlived. After the $3\frac{1}{2}$ days life re-enters the martyred bodies, and their mission is vindicated. In the description of their revival there are clear reminiscences of Ezek. xxxvii. 5–10. 'The seer sees the church of the martyrs recovering herself from the effects of an age of persecution, as Ezekiel had seen new life infused into a dead Israel' (Swete).

12. Like Jesus, the witnesses are caught up into heaven in the cloud (Acts i. 9); but with this difference, that while the enemies of Jesus did not behold the ascension, the enemies of the witnesses did. Yet the triumph of Jesus has become evident to all.

13. The judgment upon the city had the effect of bringing the survivors to repentance. This detail belongs to the original use of the passage, not to the situation which John has in view. The trumpet-judgments which summoned to repentance are past; and only the seventh remains to sound, which opens out

into a new series of judgments in which no place of repentance is to be found. Henceforward nothing remains but the outpouring of the wrath of God for the destruction of all that has allied itself to evil.

Various conjectures as to the incident referred to have been made. The time immediately before or during the siege of Jerusalem is not a possible one, for then the Romans and the Jews were in hostility. The murder of James by Herod (Acts xii.), which pleased the Jews, and the martyrdom of Peter and Paul at the hand of Nero, have both received support. The latter seems to be excluded by the fact that the event is located in Jerusalem.

The Seventh Trumpet.

14. Transition to the seventh trumpet. We should have expected the first part of the verse to close chap. ix. But it is deferred to this point to preserve the form (see ix. 12).

The seventh trumpet (vers. 15–19) ushers in the triumph of the Kingdom of Christ. In these verses the author, after his usual manner, gives an anticipatory summary of what is to follow.

15. Great voices in heaven announce the advent of Christ's triumph. *The kingdoms of this world*, R.V. **the kingdom,** *i.e.* the Roman Empire. **is become.** God calls that which is not yet as though it were, and faith in God enables us to do the like. Through faith man lives in the light of the ideal. **He shall reign.** No distinction in glory is made between the Lord and His Christ.

16. As in chaps. iv. and v., the glory of the consummation is suggested to the minds of the seer and his readers by the outburst of praise that it evokes from the elders around the Throne.

17. *and art to come.* These words are to be omitted. From the point of view of the elders, God is no longer the Coming One. He has come. The 'art to come' has given place to 'Thou hast taken thy great power, and didst reign.' **didst reign,** *i.e.* didst enter upon Thy Kingdom.

18. The writer projects the thoughts of his readers to the completed triumph. They will one day look back upon the finished battle. **The nations were wroth**, rather 'roused to anger' (cf. Ps. ii. 1), and in answer to their wrath **Thy wrath came** and wrought out history. This epitome looks even beyond the present struggle to the judgment of the dead, and the rewarding of the servants of God, and the destruction of the wicked (see notes on chap. xx.) **to destroy them that destroy the earth**, *i.e.* by working out to its conclusion idolatry and the worship of the beast (xix. 2). Note the graphic realistic touch suggested by the lapse into the present participle 'are destroying.' The writer's language keeps close to his thought.

19. **there was opened the temple of God.** The writer assures his readers of the truth of his prophecy by thus asserting that he had been permitted to see into the very secret of God. **The ark of His covenant** was the symbol and pledge to the Israelites of God's presence with them in all their wanderings. If we were to seek for some Christian substitute for this ancient Jewish symbol, we should find it in the Cross of Christ. It is the witness and pledge of all that God is to the world.

The Great Antagonism.

Chap. xii. opens a new stage in the writer's argument. Hitherto he has been setting forth the general condition of the Empire. But an Empire over which God's warnings have sounded unheeded is ripe for a new and tremendous manifestation of evil.

A Greek myth that was doubtless well known in Asia told how the dragon Python persecuted Leto before the birth of Apollo. But she was caught away to a place of refuge; and her divine child, three days later, returned to slay the monster at Parnassus. In this story the writer sees an allegory of the vital opposition between good and evil, between Christ and Satan. The coming into view of the good is symbolised by a birth, the mode of

entrance of all living things into the world. Christ or Christianity is about to be born. And over against this dawning power is a great red dragon waiting to devour the child as soon as it should be born. But the child is snatched out of his reach to the very throne of God; and the monster turns to wreak his baffled rage on those who are His faithful servants. Henceforth the conflict is waged on the earth in human history.

1, 2. *there appeared a great wonder in heaven*, R.V. **a great sign was seen in heaven.** By **sign** is meant the visible symbol of a spiritual fact. Both the woman and the dragon are symbols standing for spiritual realities. In the Fourth Gospel the miracles of Jesus are called *signs*, as being the outward manifestations of His Spirit. **in heaven.** The symbols are represented as painted across the sky. But as the vision proceeds, there is a transition from a picture in the sky to events in the unseen world. **a woman.** Who is meant by this woman? is a question to which various answers—the Virgin Mary, the Christian Church, the Jewish Church—have been given. But perhaps this feature of the picture is subordinate. The significant point is that for the redemption of the world a new and divine thing had to be born into it. No forces adequate to save it were in itself. Salvation must come from God. **arrayed with the sun . . . twelve stars.** This may be a reminiscence of Gen. xxxvii. 9 f. Or it may simply be meant to set forth the glory of the Church of God over against the horrid features of the dragon.

3. The opposing power is represented under the figure of a dragon. He is the embodiment of all ungodly power. In the O.T. his place is in the deep. He is not one of the heavenly beings, like Job's Satan, who can attend on God's audience days and utter his opinions regarding mankind. He is *red* or fiery-red, denoting his fierceness. His seven diademed heads may be intended to suggest that he sums up in himself the whole of evil. His horns, in which lie his powers for injury, are ten, a number which suggests the greatness, but also the limitation, of his power.

4. **And his tail draweth . . . to the earth.** Here we have a combination of very diverse elements. The main idea is that the fall of the angels was due to their seduction by some tempter of the same mould as themselves. This element is derived from Jewish apocalypse. The fall of stars from heaven is a common way in apocalyptic writings of describing the fall of the angels. (See note on ix. 1. But while the main idea is Jewish, it is expressed in harmony with the mythological picture which fills the canvas. The dragon draws the third part of the stars after him by the lashing of his tail, and casts them to the earth. **and the dragon stood before the woman.** This dramatically represents the way in which evil endeavours to thwart and destroy all incipient good. Notwithstanding the dependence of this picture on mythological sources, even for its details it seems hardly necessary to travel beyond the Christian tradition. Herod trying to cut off the Child Jesus would, in the writer's view, be a manifestation of Satanic hate. It would encourage the Christians to be reminded that the cause that seemed to be lying between the anvil and the hammer had been delivered from the same enemy when his chance of success seemed much greater.

5. This verse implies not only the birth and ascension of Christ, but also all the steps that led up to His enthronement at the right hand of God

6. **And the woman fled,** etc. This may be a reference to the flight of the Jewish Christians to Pella before the investment of Jerusalem by the Romans, of which we are informed by tradition (cf. Matt. xxiv. 16). It has also been suggested that the flight into Egypt from the wrath of Herod may have been in the writer's mind. The main lesson is that the Church of Christ is beyond the power of any earthly foe to destroy it. For the meaning of 1260 days, 'the times of final stress and struggle,' see note on xi. 2.

But means must be found to bring the conflict down to earth, and for this purpose recourse is had to Jewish legend. That Heaven had once been torn with civil war, that its inhabitants

had occupied rival camps under Michael and Satan, that Satan had been overcome in battle and had been cast forth to seek refuge on the earth, that there he has found a new sphere for his activity and a new instrument of his will, are the series of steps by which the hostility of Satan to Christ is transferred from the invisible to the visible world.

The passage 7–12 obviously stands by itself. Its introduction is abrupt and awkward. Its atmosphere and view-point are different from those of the rest of the chapter. The picture of a monster waiting to devour a newborn child gives place to a battle between contending angelic hosts. No mention is made in it of the Messiah, but other personages, Michael and his armies, fill the stage. The dragon, who is neither native to nor natural in the passage, has to be formally identified with Satan or the Devil, the antagonist of God in Jewish thought (ver. 9). In these verses we are in the atmosphere of Jewish apocalypse.

7. **And there was war in heaven.** In all probability the writer believed that this war was a real event of celestial history. **Michael** is one of the seven angel princes of Jewish legend, and takes a growingly prominent place as a warrior and the defender of Israel. He is called 'one of the chief princes' (Dan. x. 13); 'your prince,' *i.e.* Israel's (x. 21); 'the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people' (xii. 1). Nations were supposed to have their representative princes in the unseen world, as in the Middle Ages they were supposed to have their patron-saints. See 'the prince of the kingdom of Persia' (Dan. x. 13); 'the prince of Greece' (x. 20). Daniel represents the Divine dealings with nations under the figure of struggles between these princes.

8. Satan and his followers are defeated and cast out of Heaven. Heaven had been the dwelling-place of Satan and his angels (see Job i. 6); but they forfeited it by their rebellion (Jude 6).

9. The dragon cast down to earth. *cast out*, R.V. cast down, overthrown, defeated. **he that is called**, *i.e.* in the O.T. and

other Jewish books. **the devil**, *i.e.* diabolus or the slanderer. **Satan**, the accuser, or the adversary (Zech. iii. 1, 2). **the deceiver of the whole world.** The work of Satan coincides with his name. He is the deceiver of men with regard to God, and he is the slanderer of man to God. There is perhaps here a reference to the *delatores* or accusers who were encouraged to report Christians to the government. Satan is the great *delator*.

The intimation of victory is conveyed to the seer, and through him to his readers, by an authoritative utterance from Heaven, which announces, not merely the defeat of Satan and his expulsion from Heaven, but also his defeat on earth. The triumph of Christ involves the triumph of His followers. And it is to be obtained through the blood of the Lamb and through the word of their testimony, and through faithfulness even to the extent of giving up life.

10. **I heard a great voice in heaven, saying.** 'There is no doubt in it, no fear.' **the salvation** is here almost equal to 'the victory' (Moffatt), the victory that manifests itself in the salvation. **the power.** Not the Empire, but the suffering Church, is identified with what in the universe is power. **the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ.** This is the situation as seen in the light of Heaven. As seen from the standpoint of earth it is still 'the tribulation and kingdom and patience' (i. 9). But the situation in Heaven will become the situation on earth too. The writer loses no opportunity of reminding his readers of the exalted place of Him who, as their Lord and Master, claims their allegiance.

11. **they overcame him.** The subject of the sentence is *our brethren*. It is theirs to realise on earth the victory that has already been achieved in Heaven. The course of conduct to which John was summoning them—endurance of the worst that their enemies could inflict—was the means by which the victory would be achieved.

12. **Therefore rejoice, O heavens.** The ground of heaven's joy is that it has seen the last of Satan. **Woe for the earth and for**

the sea. This gives the reason why the establishment of the Kingdom of God upon earth is called a woe (xi. 14), and why the little book, which contained the account of it, was bitter when it was swallowed. The devil has found earth a stage on which he could protract the conflict against God. To be the battlefield of such a struggle must entail misery and suffering, and justifies the 'Woe for.' Moreover, the severity of the struggle is aggravated by the great wrath of the devil, since he knows that his time is short. Nothing can save the situation and turn his defeat into victory. All that is open to him is to do what mischief he can. Knowing that he hath but a short time, he will make the most of it in wreaking his malice upon those who are God's. *Morituus mordet.* The short time is the $3\frac{1}{2}$ years of vers. 6, 14.

13, 14. Evil cast down upon the earth immediately begins to energise, and its activity takes the form of persecution of what is of God. These two verses are an expansion of ver. 6, showing that 7–12 are an insertion. The writer tries to bring ver. 13 into closer connection with the previous section by means of the clause, 'And **when the dragon saw that he was cast down to the earth.**' **the two wings of the great eagle.** The great eagle (probably the griffin-vulture) is doubtless a conventional apocalyptic symbol suggesting protection. (Cf. Ex. xix. 4; Deut. xxxii. 11.) **her place.** See ver. 6. **a time,** etc. See note on xi. 2. **from the face,** *i.e.* 'safe from' (Moffatt).

15. **cause her to be carried away by the stream.** The Greek is very expressive. 'Carried away by the stream' is one word. 'Render her stream-rapt.' Under this there may lie some actual incident of which we now know nothing. If the woman flying into the wilderness is suggested by the flight of the Christians to Pella, the river sent out after her might be a detachment of Roman troops dispatched to cut off their retreat, an attempt foiled by some human instrument in the hands of God. If, as is probable, we have here an old piece of literature adapted by John to the present situation, the reference of this

detail may lie in the original circumstances. The lesson that stands out clear is that God protects His own.

16. Persecution is brought to nought as the water is swallowed up in the sand.

17. **went away to make war.** Baffled in his attempt to thwart the gracious purpose of God in the birth of His Son, foiled in his endeavour to get the Church of Christ into his power, Satan has to content himself with making war upon individual Christians. The hopelessness of his position could not be more vividly portrayed than by saying that all that he can do is mischief. He can inflict no real or permanent hurt. **which keep the commandments . . . testimony of Jesus** may be an explanatory addition by the seer to the original writing.

The Beast from the Sea.

But while the evil against which the Church had to contend was in its last resort spiritual, the nature of human life implies that spiritual forces must manifest themselves in a historical embodiment. Accordingly, chap. xiii. introduces us to an institution or world-power which Satan is able to fill with his spirit, and employ as the instrument of his malignant will.

xii. 18. *I stood*, R.V. **he stood.** Between these two readings it it is difficult to make choice. Most modern scholars prefer the reading of the R.V. as supported by the best MSS. But Ramsay and Moffatt contend strongly for the A.V. reading. In view of this disagreement of the authorities, can a decision be arrived at on general grounds? And on this test the balance seems to incline towards the A.V. 1. New visions are generally preceded by a statement as to the seer's point of view. In chap. xii. the seer is in the region of the transcendental; in chap. xiii. he comes down to earth. We naturally expect some intimation of this change, and the phrase 'I stood, and I saw,' is very fitting. 2. It is from the point of view of John and

his readers, not from the point of view of Satan, that the two beasts rise from the sea and the land respectively. These words may embalm the memory of some hallowed spot on the shore of Patmos whence he had been gazing westward across the Ægean when the meaning in God's plan of the sufferings of the Church came home to him with uplifting and inspiring power. And the circumstances in which such a conviction took hold of him are worthy of statement.

1. **And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea.** This vision is conceived from the point of view of Asia Minor. Rome was a Western power from beyond the Ægean, and therefore rising up out of the sea. So in 4 Ezra xi. 1 the eagle, *i.e.* Rome, comes from the sea. A **beast** or monster was a familiar apocalyptic image for an empire (see Dan. vii. 3). The practical identity of the beast from the sea with the dragon is seen in the fact that both have ten horns and seven heads. But while the dragon's heads are diademed, *i.e.* royal, the beast has the diadems upon his horns, while on his heads are names of blasphemy. For the significance of the horns and the heads, see notes on chap. xvii. 9, 16. In the description of the beast rising from the sea the mention of the horns precedes that of the heads because they would first become visible. *the name of blasphemy*, R.V. **names of.** There was not one of the emperors but laid claim to divinity. They took the title Augustus (Greek Sebastos, Adorable). After their death and even during their lifetime, they were honoured with temples.

2. While the beasts of Daniel stood for different empires, in the eyes of John the Roman Empire combined the evil characteristics of all past world-powers. It was in this many-featured monster that Satan found the fit instrument for his purpose. Rome possessed all the qualities needed to enable him to make war with the seed of the woman (xii. 17). The dominion and sway of Rome are conceived of as given by the dragon to further his own evil purpose, thus 'stamping the Empire as a weird and wild messiah of the devil on earth' (Moffatt).

3, 4. On the wounded head, see notes on xvii. 11. **smitten**

unto death. The word translated *smitten* or slain is the same that is used with reference to the Lamb in chap. v. Here and throughout the rest of the Book there is suggested an elaborate parallelism between the beast and the Lamb, the former being, as it were, in every point the hideous counterfeit of the latter.

Ver. 4 sets forth the stupid wonder with which the world regards anything large and monstrous. The might of Rome fascinated the eyes of men. The world gaped with astonishment at it. **Who is like unto the beast?** is perhaps a parody on such passages as Ex. xv. 11, or of the name Michael (Who is like God?).

5. **a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies.** The blasphemies were the claim to Divine honours. **to continue,** literally, **to do his works during** (see R.V. marg.). **forty and two months.** See note on xi. 2.

6. *in blasphemy*, R.V. **for blasphemies,** *i.e.* to speak blasphemies. **His tabernacle,** the Church (cf. Apoc. xx. 9, 'the camp of the saints'). The tabernacle of God is further described as **them that dwell,** or tabernacle, **in heaven.** *And* should be omitted, and the clause treated as standing in apposition to tabernacle. But it may be an addition by a later hand.

7. This verse is a fulfilment of xi. 7. The world-wide dominion which Christ refused at the hand of Satan, Rome did not refuse.

8. To the universal worship of the beast there was but one exception—every one whose name was written in the book of life of the Lamb. The names in the Lamb's book of life belong to those who have the life of the Lamb; and the nature of that life is explained by the phrase 'that was slain.' It is such life as comes through death (see note on ii 8). Only those whose eyes have been opened to the glory of the Cross are delivered from the glamour of world-power. **from the foundation of the world** should probably go with written rather than with slain (see xvii. 8).

9. **If any man hath an ear, let him hear,** impressively calls attention to the solemn words that are about to be spoken.

But by a curious irony there is great uncertainty with regard

to the meaning of the verse to which attention is so impressively called.

In the A.V. the two clauses are consistent with one another. They bring to the suffering Christians the consoling thought that the persecutors will receive retribution in the same manner as they inflicted suffering. There is no doubt about the broad general truth of this teaching; but it is not the teaching that the circumstances of John's readers demanded. The R.V., following an improved reading, introduces a change into one of the clauses, and so makes them inconsistent with one another. 'If any man is for captivity (the persecuted), into captivity he goeth: if any man shall kill with the sword, with the sword must he be killed.' The second clause may refer either to the persecutor, in which case we have the teaching of the A.V.; or to the persecuted, in which case there is set forth the fate that will overtake any attempt at forcible resistance. But such resistance would not suggest itself to them for a moment.

We must, therefore, fall back on a reading which is supported by what is regarded as inferior evidence, but which probably preserves the correct meaning. The verse is clearly a reminiscence of Jer. xv. 2. It is impossible—such is the message that the prophet is commissioned to deliver—for any one to escape the fate that is appointed for him. Now this is just the lesson that John needed to press home upon his readers. He can hold out to them no hope of escape from suffering and perhaps death. What else can be the result of their offering defiance to a power so monstrous, so brutal, so ruthless as the Roman Empire? If they refuse to join in the worship of the beast, the beast will devour them. And yet it is to such a defiance that the whole Book summons them, and to accept such a fate that the writer heartens them. For such suffering is the pathway to glory; such death is the door into everlasting life.

Teaching like this needed the *nota bene* of ver. 9. That this is the lesson which the writer meant to bring home receives confirmation from the last clause of the verse: Here is the

patience and the faith of the saints ('Here is room for' (Moffatt)). It was the character of their position, the hopelessness of resistance, the impossibility of escape, that furnished the opportunity for, and called for the exercise of, endurance and faith.

The Beast from the Land.

11–18. The second beast, the beast from the land.

The Roman Empire was powerless to hurt so long as the sea was between it and its victims. But in the practical administration of the province it was brought into mischievous contact with the followers of Jesus. In the remaining half of this chapter we have testimony of first-rate importance that the authorities brought the strongest inducements to bear upon them to compel them to conform to the imperial worship. Some of the details are corroborated by other authorities, and there is no reason for supposing that those for which this chapter is the sole authority are less trustworthy. The author was evidently acquainted with the situation which he describes. Apocalyptic language is almost entirely discarded for the directness and simplicity of the eye-witness.

11. **another beast coming up out of the earth.** In Prof. Ramsay's *Seven Churches* p. 104 there is an illustration showing that deities of native origin were represented as rising out of the earth. Here, then, is meant some home-born power which, as the executive of the foreign ruler, was the direct agent of persecution. Now, no body fulfils all the necessary conditions of interpretation like the native council or commune of the province, at the head of which were the Asiarchs. (See Introduction, Sect. I.) **he had two horns like a lamb.** Prof. Ramsay sees in these two horns the twofold function, civil and religious, that still, in theory at least, belonged to the native council. The lamb may indicate the generally peaceful character of the province. Anderson Scott thinks that the two horns are suggested by the shape of the head-dress worn by the priest of the

imperial cultus. **and he spake as a dragon.** With all its apparent gentleness, the beast had the cruelty and craftiness of Satan. Any one who has lived in a country in which a governing race utilises native courts in administration, will readily understand how the Asiarchs would probably act towards those who were disaffected with even greater severity than the Roman officials themselves.

12. As the first beast was the executive of Satan, so the second beast was the executive of the first. It was armed with its powers by the Empire. *before him*, R.V. **in his sight.** See on ver. 14. **And he maketh all the earth and them that dwell therein to worship the first beast.** The chief, almost the only, function that was left to the native council at this time was the care of the imperial cultus. **whose death-stroke was healed.** See on xvii. 8.

13. The Asiarchs employed, doubtless through some quack in their service, pretended miracles to overawe the minds of the followers of Jesus. All the resources of science and magic that the cleverness of some rogue put within their reach were used. To appreciate the force of the pressure to which they were thus exposed, we must remember the proneness to superstition of the inhabitants of Asia (Acts xviii. 14–19). What could not be explained must spring from a Divine source. Even the writer does not deny the reality of the miracles, but attributes them to the power of Satan. Some manipulation of fireworks is probably referred to here. **in the sight of men.** 'Seeing is believing' would be the point of the argument.

14. The effect of this magical exhibition was to deceive the spectators. But the writer subtly suggests that those who are Christ's escape the deception. Those who are willing to be deceived are deceived. **in the sight of the beast** shows that these methods were employed in the presence and with the approval of the imperial authorities. The Roman officials stooped to the use of magic to subjugate the Christians to the imperial worship. Perhaps they themselves were dupes of the wily magician.

saying, and a hint was equivalent to a command. Cæsar-worship was identified with loyalty, and to be slack in carrying out such a suggestion would argue less than loyalty. **that they should make an image to the beast**, *i.e.* in a temple dedicated to the worship of the emperor. **who hath . . . lived.** 'Who lived through the stroke of the sword,' a striking analogy to ii. 8.

15. On the suggestion of the quack the image was made ; and by further use of his magical powers, he made it seem to be alive and to utter sounds, perhaps by ventriloquism. The utterances took the form of a demand for the death of those who refused to offer worship, thus giving persecution an apparently Divine sanction.

16. At the instigation of the magician two decrees were promulgated by the Asiarchs. The first was **that there be given to all a mark**. It is not necessary to suppose that a physical mark is referred to. The necessities are sufficiently met if we suppose some method by which loyalty would be made clear. Accordingly it has been conjectured that the mark consisted in a certificate issued by the native council, that the bearer had complied with the demands of the government. These certificates would have to be applied for, and proof of compliance furnished. This no follower of Christ could do. The one thing that stands out clear is that so zealous were the authorities in the matter, that they laid upon every one the burden of making it perfectly plain that he was in full sympathy with the imperial religion. How much more difficult would this make the situation of the followers of Jesus ! There was no possibility of escape for any Christian through his not obtruding his Christianity upon the public attention. It was not sufficient for him not to be a pronounced and aggressive Christian ; he must be an avowed worshipper of the emperor. The enumeration of the various classes that make up society, **the great and the small, the rich and the poor, the free and the bond**, suggests how close were the meshes of the net that was drawn round the Church.

17. The second decree was **that no man should be able to buy**

or sell, etc. This may refer to the certificates mentioned in the previous note. Before one could engage in trade he must hold such a certificate.

the number of his name. This probably means the signature of an official, perhaps the president of the native council. This phrase (see on ver. 18) lends some additional weight to the certificate explanation.

18. **Here is wisdom.** Here is scope for your intelligence and ingenuity, *i.e.* in discovering the name denoted by the number. This would seem to show that this special *gematria* was coined by John, and is made public here for the first time. **the number of the beast.** In the Hebrew and Greek languages the letters of the alphabet have each a numerical value. Accordingly, any combination of letters, *e.g.* a name, could be expressed by a number, the sum of the values of the letters. The values of the letters forming the name that John has in view when added together make up the number 666, or, if we take another ancient reading, 616. All certainty as to the name that was in the author's mind was soon lost. Irenæus says that of various possible names the most likely was Lateinos. A modern conjecture which has won considerable favour is the name *Neron Cæsar*, written in Hebrew characters. This solution has the recommendation that it accounts for the alternative reading 616. For if the last n of Neron be dropped, 50 falls to be deducted from 666.[x] But it is difficult to understand why all this mystery should be about the name of a dead emperor who was no favourite with Jew or Roman, or why the name should be written in Hebrew for the Christians of Asia, or how so prominent a name should so soon be forgotten, especially in view of the expectation of his return, which obtained for long. But have interpreters been looking in the right direction? The number of the beast! Which beast? The beast from the sea, or from the land? The following considerations point to the latter as being the bearer of the name. 1. As it was the local executive that was most active in the prosecution of Cæsar-worship, and was most severe on the

[x] Deissmann's theory must [illegible]

Christians, it would be more impressive for them to be reminded that the man before whose judgment-seat they were brought was the agent of antichrist, and was passing on with all his pomp and power to share in the doom of antichrist (see xix. 20). 2. It is more intelligible that the name of a zealous Asiarch should cease to be remembered in the Church when the immediate struggle was past, than that the name of Nero or of any other emperor should be forgotten. 3. If the purpose in putting the matter thus was secrecy, the necessity would be even greater if the name was that of a local dignitary.

The latter half of the thirteenth chapter is of first-rate importance. It sets forth before us the methods of Roman administration with regard to religious affairs in Asia, as clearly as does Pliny's famous letter with regard to the Church in Bithynia fourteen years later. It shows us how many-featured and cumulative was the pressure that was brought to bear upon the followers of Jesus, and how difficult it must have been to be a Christian at that time. In the progress of the theme of the Book, also, this chapter is of cardinal importance. It marks the parting of the ways. In the writer's view, in making the claim to Divine honours, the Empire was making deliberate choice to stand with Satan. And by that choice its doom was irrevocably sealed.

Visions of Hope.

In a transition which exhibits at once the most perfect art and the most practical wisdom, the writer passes from contemplation of the present situation of the Church to the presentation of the state of blessedness which will be attained by those who are faithful in endurance. Nothing is open to his readers, consistent with faithfulness to Christ, but suffering and death. But suffering and death were the road which Christ trod, and the same road would lead them to His side. And in vers. 1–5 the writer draws such a picture of the blessedness of those who are with Christ as will appeal to their imagination.

Chap. xiv. 1. *a Lamb stood*, R.V. **the Lamb standing**, suggests that He is prepared to enter upon the war of destruction of the dragon's works. **on the mount Zion.** Not the earthly, but the heavenly mount Zion. **with Him an hundred and forty and four thousand.** With the dragon is the beast, the Roman Empire, and all the world that wondered after the beast. With the Lamb is the whole company of the redeemed. As the episode of chap. vii. looks forward to the coming tribulation, so here the writer in imagination looks back over the struggle. Here is the muster and the roll-call after the battle, and not one is missing. *having His Father's name.* The R.V. reads, **having His name, and the name of His Father.** The followers of the beast have the mark of the beast and the number of his name upon them ; the followers of the Lamb bear the name of the Lamb and of His Father. This is the seal with which they had been sealed (vii. 3).

2. The contrast is still further carried out. The followers of the beast had raised to him the song of praise, 'Who is like unto the beast?' the followers of the Lamb, too, raise a song of praise, 'loud as many waters' noise, sweet as harp's melodious voice.'

3. **they sing as it were a new song.** Some authorities read simply *a new song.* The throne and the living creatures and the elders seem to be regarded as making up together the conception of deity. They are one in the reception of worship. **no man could learn the song save.** The new song is the expression of an experience which they who would sing it must pass through.

> 'Wouldst thou learn the ocean secret?
> In our galley thou must go.'[1]

The 144,000 are further described as **they that had been purchased out of the earth.** This has a wider meaning than 'bought with a price' (1 Cor. vi. 20). It means delivered from all the temptations and inducements that were brought to bear upon them to make them apostatise from the Lamb.

4. To understand this verse, as some have done, as a glorifica-

[1] Lockhart, *Spanish Ballads*, 'Count Arnaldos.'

tion of asceticism, puts it out of line with the whole trend of the Book. The symbol is a common one in the prophets for idolatry, and the licentious character of pagan worship doubtless helped to justify its use. If the verse is from the hand of John, it refers to the great apostasy, Cæsar worship. It has to be admitted, however, that it comes in rather abruptly and awkwardly, and it is perhaps better to regard it as a marginal gloss by a later enthusiastic ascetic who mistook the meaning of the 144,000. **virgins**, *i.e.* virgin-like, undefiled. **they which follow the Lamb** is the designation of those who have been faithful in tribulation. We catch in this phrase something of the spirit that afterwards breathed through chivalry. See the song of the Knights at the close of 'The Coming of Arthur,' in the *Idylls of the King*.

whithersoever He goeth, even unto death. **to be the first-fruits unto God and unto the Lamb.** The first-fruits of the harvest were sacred to God. So the first-fruits in any righteous cause are those who are its pioneers and who bear the first brunt of the world's hostility. They constitute the ever incomplete, ever being completed, 144,000. For every season has its harvest, and every harvest its first-fruits.

5. *no guile*, R.V. no lie. *before the throne of God* is to be omitted. *without fault*, R.V. **without blemish**, carrying out the idea of sacrifice. All the O.T. sacrifices were to be without blemish.

The rest of the chapter is taken up with a series of visions, some of which adumbrate scenes which are afterwards described in fuller detail.

The angel with the eternal gospel (vi. 7).

6. **another angel.** It is uncertain to what previously mentioned angel *another* refers back. **flying in mid-heaven**, *i.e.* in the sight and the hearing of the whole world (cf. viii. 13). *the everlasting gospel*, R.V. **an eternal gospel.** **them that dwell on the earth.** This has been pointed out as the only instance in the Apocalypse in which this phrase is not used in a bad sense. See in iii. 10 and next note. **to proclaim unto** or over. The preposition used here is an unusual one. Perhaps it is meant to suggest that the

gospel, so welcome to believers, at the same time announces the falling of judgment on the impenitent.

7. The contents of the gospel are an assertion of the truth denied in Cæsar-worship, that there is a living God, who is the Creator and Judge of the world.

A second angel announces the fall of Rome (8).

another angel, R.V. **another angel, a second.** **Babylon** is the apocalyptic name for Rome (1 Pet. v. 13). **which hath made all the nations to drink.** The writer lays the responsibility of the seduction of the nations upon Rome. *because she made*, R.V. **which hath made.** **the wine of the wrath.** There may be a fusion of two ideas, the cup being at once the cup of Rome's seduction and the cup of God's anger. The image is a common one in the O.T. for idolatry. It was the practice in ancient times for people that came under the influence of a great city to pay it the compliment of adopting the worship of its gods, or to attempt to secure a share in its greatness by courting their services. Rome had seduced the nations of the earth to Cæsar-worship.

The fate awaiting those who sell themselves to the worship of the beast (9–11).

9. *the third angel*, R.V. **another angel, a third.**

10. **he also,** *i.e.* as well as Babylon. Her dupes will be involved in her doom. *poured out without mixture*, R.V. **prepared unmixed**, literally, 'mingled unmixed.' The preparation of wine for drinking consisted in mingling water with it, as it was considered too thick and heating to be drunk otherwise. This cup is mixed, yet no elements of mercy are poured into it. **tormented.** These images must be treated as symbols, like golden streets and foundations of precious stones. But it must not be forgotten that they represent spiritual realities; and that the realities are more, not less, than the symbols. Nothing can adequately express the torture of a conscience awakened to the knowledge of all the rejected nobleness, and all the accepted degradation of a life sold to sin. To the soul which was made for God, but has chosen evil; which was capable of bearing the character of God,

yet has accepted the image of the beast, the memory of rejected good, of accepted evil, must be the worm that dieth not, the fire that is not quenched.

13. The effect of the terrible picture of 9–11 is still further heightened by a contrasted picture of the blessedness of those who by their faithfulness have incurred suffering and death. In the one case escape from persecution leads to unutterable woe; in the other suffering and death lead to ineffable blessedness. **I heard a voice from heaven saying, Write.** This is one of the writer's *nota benes*, by which he calls attention to an important statement that he is about to make.

The Church applies this beatitude to the blessed dead generally. But its primary reference was to those who in the near future would be called upon to give up life in the persecution that was imminent; and, in a secondary degree, to all those who throughout the Church's history would have to face death or suffering for the faith. **the dead which die in the Lord.** The special circumstances of the Asian Christians determine the meaning to be attached to this phrase, and thus make it different from the similar phrase used in 1 Thess. iv. 16; 1 Cor. xv. 18. **from henceforth** goes with die rather than with blessed. The time was at hand when the toils of persecution described in xiii. 11–18 would be drawn so close around the followers of Jesus, that to die in the Lord and to die a violent death would be synonymous. **labours.** So are designated the utmost sufferings that the world can inflict, in contrast with the agonies of suffering that shall be the lot of them that worship the beast. **that they may rest.**

> 'Sleep after toil, port after stormy seas,
> Death after life doth greatly please.'[1]

and their works, R.V. for. 'Each man's work shall be made manifest. If any man's work shall abide' (1 Cor. iii. 13 f.).

The harvest and the vintage (14–20).

14. **on the cloud I saw one sitting like unto a son of man.**

[1] Spenser.

There are features in this description that point to the figure as being that of Christ.

15. **and another angel.** This does not imply that the one sitting on the cloud is an angel. *Another* may be used to distinguish, not from him that sitteth on the cloud, but from the angels previously brought on the scene. **from the temple.** The temple is the innermost shrine of the presence of God, from whom all the activities of Heaven take their beginning. The loud voice which gives the signal to the reaper is also the seer's way of intimating to the world that the time to reap has come. *Thrust in*, R.V. **Send forth.** *ripe*, R.V. **over-ripe**, *dried up* (marg.), 'fully ripe.'

16. *thrust in*, R.V. **cast**, indicating the homeward sweep of the sickle rather than an outward stroke. Cf. Hos. vi. 11.

17. That the agent here is an angel does not involve that the One sitting on the cloud is not Christ. Christ Himself gathers His own, while the gathering of others is committed to inferior agents.

18. **from the altar.** The prayers of the martyrs have brought the time. **the clusters of the vine of the earth**, the gross, full-blooded, bloated civilisation that has arisen against the Church of Christ.

20. The sharp transition in the symbolism from a vintage to a sanguinary conflict suggests the close connection between historical events and God's working. The blood that will be shed in profusion in the overthrow of the nations will have the spiritual significance of God treading the winepress of His wrath. **without the city**, *i.e.* the Church, which, in the final conflict, will have come forth safe and redeemed (see on xv. 2). **Unto the bridles**, an apocalyptic image, found in Enoch, showing the greatness of the slaughter. The **furlong** or stadium was about 194 yards. 1600 stadia = 170–180 miles.

Do the harvest and the vintage refer to the righteous and the wicked respectively, or to the wicked only?

The impression given in the harvest section is that it is the

righteous that are spoken of. He that is sitting upon the white cloud, with His golden crown and His human aspect, seems an entirely beneficent Being; and we have seen reason to regard Him as Christ come to receive His own unto Himself. On the other hand, it is impossible to mistake the tragic character of the vintage. The authority to lop off the clusters comes from the altar, from which the prayers of the martyrs have been crying for vengeance. The phrase 'vine of the earth' suggests grossness and rankness and bloatedness. And the final word, 'cast into the winepress of the wrath of God,' leaves no doubt that the fate of the wicked is in view.

The Vials.

Chap. xv. is the prelude to a new series of judgments

1. **another sign.** Cf. xii. 1, 3. **seven angels having seven plagues,** angels of punishment. *the seven last plagues.* The R.V. is more emphatic, **seven plagues which are the last. for in them is finished,** etc. (see x. 7).

2–4. A vision of the victorious redeemed.

2. **as it were a glassy sea mingled with fire** (cf. iv. 6). The sea is probably a conventional feature, and the description of it is intended to enhance the glory of the scene. It may have been suggested to the seer as he looked across the Ægean with the sun setting in the west. *them that had gotten the victory over,* R.V. **them that come victorious from.** 'The preposition contains the twofold idea of victory over and deliverance from' (Moffatt). The conflict is summed up as **the beast and his image and the number of his name.** From all that was involved in that they had fought themselves clear. **come victorious,** *i.e.* have the abiding character of conqueror.

> 'by God's will
> Doubt not, the last word is still
> "Victory"!'[1]

[1] Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

And over his mark is to be omitted. *on the sea*, R.V. by (R.V. marg. upon). **harps of God**, the symbol of the perfect praise of Heaven. The epithet of God is perhaps the Hebrew superlative, as in 'mountains of God.'

the song of Moses. The scene is suggested by the incident of the Israelites standing by the Red Sea singing praises for their deliverance and the destruction of their enemies. They have been brought through 'a sea of troubles.' But the additional phrase, **and the song of the Lamb**, enlarges the conception of the nature of the deliverance. It was a song of Moses, inasmuch as it celebrated escape from their enemies; it was the song of the Lamb, inasmuch as the way of escape was the sacrifice of Christ repeated in their experience. The song is full of O.T. phraseology gathered from various sources.

King of saints. There are three readings, *King of saints*, **King of nations** (see R.V. marg.), and **King of the ages**, the last of which the Revisers have adopted into the text (cf. Jer. x. 7). **holy.** The Greek word so translated is used of God only here and in xvi. 5, and of Christ in Heb. vii. 26. It is generally used of human holiness. *judgments*, R.V. **righteous acts.**

5, 6. The destruction of everything that is sinful comes forth from the shrine of the tabernacle of witness, *i.e.* issues from the very character of God Himself. *clothed in pure and white linen*, R.V. **arrayed with precious stone, pure and bright.** The original Greek words, *linon* and *lithon*, differ only in one letter. WH. says that the word used in the Apocalypse for a garment of fine linen is not *linon* but *bussinon*. The clothing, precious stone (or linen) denotes glorious beauty (or purity and holiness); while the girding of the breasts denotes readiness to serve (cf. i. 13).

7. **one of the four living creatures.** In v. 8 the four living creatures and the elders have vials full of odours. Is it meant to be inferred that the vials full of odours turn into vials full of wrath? The *vials* or **bowls** were saucer-shaped vessels, whose contents could be poured out at once and suddenly. The significance of the symbol lies in this. The seven angels are to

'drench the earth with plagues' (Moffatt. **wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever,** *i.e.* unending wrath.

Chap. xvi. After the vision of the triumph of the saints, the vials of God's wrath are poured out upon the world that is devoted to destruction.

Both the differences and resemblances between the Trumpet and the Vial series of judgments are significant. They differ in their purpose; for while the Trumpets are calls to repentance, the Vials are the outpourings of wrath. Again, they differ in the breadth of their incidence: for while the Trumpets are partial, the Vials are complete. Once more, the Trumpets lay stress on the means by which the judgments were conveyed, the judgments in their activity; while the Vials emphasise the effect produced. They agree in the spheres in which they operate; and they are sufficiently parallel to suggest that they are the same visitations looked at in different aspects. The alliance with the beast as embodied in Cæsar-worship had turned the Trumpets into Vials.

Much of the imagery is derived from the plagues of Egypt, though it is employed and combined with the greatest freedom.

1. **a great voice out of the temple.** *i.e.* announcing the will of God. **into the earth. The earth** in this verse has a wider meaning than in ver. 2. Here it means the world in its widest sense.

2. The first Bowl. The judgment upon the land.

The imagery is taken from the sixth plague of Egypt, in which boils broke out upon man when Moses scattered a handful of the ashes of a furnace into the air (Ex. ix. 8–11).

3. The second Bowl. The judgment upon the sea (cf. viii. 8).

blood as of a dead man. *i.e.* dark in colour, like coagulated blood. Was it some natural phenomenon, like sunset over the sea, that suggested this image?

4–7. The third Bowl. The judgment upon the rivers and fountains of water (cf. viii. 10 f.).

5. The justice of the judgment is confessed by the waters on

which the judgment fell (the angel of the waters), and by those on whose account it was inflicted (the altar, which is always associated with the martyrs). **angels of the waters.** See note on vii. 1. Omit *O Lord* and *which shalt be* (for God has already come); and read, **Which art, and which wast, thou Holy One.** God is the Holy One as being true to His promises.

6. Blood is the predominant fact, and in the original it receives emphatic position. 'For blood of saints and prophets did they pour forth, and blood to them hast Thou given to drink.' The age was an age of blood; so blood is the symbol of the judgment.

7. The altar utters an antiphonal confession of the justice of the judgments of the Lord. One cries to another, 'Righteous art Thou.'

8 f. The fourth Bowl. The judgment upon the sun (cf. viii. 12, vii. 16). The sun may stand for all light-giving bodies. Its heat is so intensified that it scorches men. The judgment does not consist, as in the fourth Trumpet, in mere diminution of blessing. What should be a blessing becomes a curse.

10. The fifth Bowl. The judgment upon the throne of the Beast. Comparison of this Bowl with the fifth Trumpet is particularly illuminating. There a star fallen from heaven (a fallen angel) receives power to let loose a cloud of scorpion-locusts upon the earth, which torture *them that have not the seal of God upon their foreheads.* But soon this phrase gives place to the positive description, *them that have the mark of the Beast.* Something had happened to account for the change. In the writer's view, in the institution of Cæsar-worship the Empire had deliberately entered into alliance with Satan, and had taken up an unalterable attitude of hostility to God.

10. **the throne of the Beast** may mean either the seat of Cæsar-worship and the centre of persecuting power, or the institution itself. Locally the throne of the Beast is Rome, or Pergamum, the seat of the imperial government in the province of Asia (ii. 13); practically, it is the system. The fifth Bowl means the utter

destruction of the institution, with judgment upon those cities that had been its chief sites.

11. **the God of heaven.** The phrase brings out at once the enormity and the futility of the blasphemy.

12–16. The sixth Bowl. The waters of the Euphrates dried up. In the sixth Trumpet the four angels at the Euphrates are loosed, *i.e.* temporary restraints are withdrawn so as to open the way for periodical invasions from the East. Under the sixth Bowl the waters are completely dried up, so that the river barrier becomes a broad and open road, and periodic incursions become an overwhelming deluge of invasion. The kings from the sun-rising are in all probability the Parthian rulers, in alliance with whom Nero was to return from the East to destroy Rome.

With the fate of the imperial system is involved the fate of all the nations which have succumbed to its seductions through the influence of the three chief opponents of God, the dragon and the beast from the sea and the false prophet. Here the false prophet is thus spoken of for the first time. Analogy would lead us to identify him with the beast from the land (xiii. 11–18), the provincial native council, which not unlikely availed itself of the aid of some pretended magician or juggler in the promotion of its aims. The influence exerted by these three is likened to unclean spirits which, in the shape of frogs, proceed out of their mouths, perhaps because the chief means of their influence was persuasive speech.

14. **working signs.** See on xiii. 13. **go forth unto the kings of the whole world.** The subject rulers were drawn under the glamour of Cæsar worship. **the war of the great day of God,** the day of decisive conflict between the imperial worship and the worship of Christ.

15. This impressive verse is inserted immediately after the mention of the great Day of God to emphasise its nearness and to urge to watchfulness. It sounds like a trumpet-call in the ears of the Christians. **I come as a thief,** unannounced and suddenly.

watcheth, with the vigilance of a sentry. keepeth his garments, *i.e.* does not put them off and go to sleep. walk naked, etc., as those who have been aroused from slothful sleep by a sudden onset and have had to flee undressed ; so that it is made manifest to all that they have been sleeping and off their guard. This is the story of many a defeat in battle, and of many a failure to stand before temptation.

16. *And he, i.e.* Satan, R.V. they, the three evil spirits. Har-Magedon, the city or hill of Megiddo, was a fortress belonging to the tribe of Manasseh in the Plain of Esdraelon. Two decisive battles were fought in its vicinity. There Barak and Deborah defeated a combination of Canaanite kings led by Sisera (Judg iv. 15, v. 9). Thus for a time Megiddo was 'a classical scene of rout for Israel's foes.' But this impression was probably effaced by the defeat and death of Josiah (2 Kings xxiii. 29 ff. ; 2 Chron. xxxv. 22). Megiddo thus became the Flodden of Israel. The bitter lamentation which will be heard one day at Jerusalem is compared with the lamentation in the valley of Megiddo (Zech. xii. 11). Hence Har-Magedon would mean a place of decisive defeat ; 'A Rout of Megiddo, as the Hebrews say.'

17–21. The seventh Bowl. The judgment upon the air.

There remains nothing to complete the triumph of Christ but the destruction of that part of the earth which was the special sphere of Satan, 'the prince of the power of the air.'

17. A voice from the temple, the voice of God, announces the end of the strife. It is done. 'The Kingdom of this world has become the Kingdom of Our Lord and of His Christ' (xi. 15).

19. the great city would seem to be Jerusalem, in contrast to the cities of the nations and to Babylon. Babylon is, of course, Rome. was remembered in the sight of God, a striking phrase the import of which is to be brought out in subsequent chapters.

21. A talent weighed over 50 pounds.

The Judgment on Babylon.

Chaps. xvii. and xviii. are an inset, giving on a larger scale and in greater detail the judgment on Rome which has already been adumbrated in xiv. 8, xvi. 19.

Chap. xvii. 1. **one of the seven angels**, probably the last, whose bowl was poured out on Babylon. **the great harlot**, the instigator to idolatry. **that sitteth upon many waters.** This description is used in the O.T. (Jer. li. 13) of Babylon in a literal sense. But as applied to Rome it signifies her wide dominion (see on ver. 15).

2. **with whom the kings of the earth**, *i.e.* by acknowledging her divinity. **they that dwell . . . drunken.** The symbol of intoxication is perhaps meant to suggest the enthusiasm with which the provinces accepted the new idolatry. In the writer's view the native idolatries almost fade into insignificance before the great blasphemy.

3. **a wilderness.** Is the seer referring to Patmos, with its opportunities for meditation and detachment, where he could see Rome in its true light? Does he mean that he had to stand clear of her civilisation to estimate its value? **a woman.** The worst is ever the degradation of the best. **sitting upon a scarlet-coloured beast.** The epithet probably denotes at once the colour of empire and of blood. The beast is the first of chap. xiii., the Empire. Rome's greatness rested on the fact that she was the centre of the imperial power. **full of names of blasphemy** (names full of blasphemy, R.V. marg.). The beast that at first had names of blasphemy on its horns came to have them all over its body. The whole imperial system reeked of blasphemy.

Description of the woman (4–6).

4. **arrayed in purple and scarlet**, the colours of empire, denoting her luxury and splendour. **decked**, literally 'gilded' (R.V. marg.), indicates her wealth and magnificence. In her hand she bore a golden cup which was full of abominations.

even the unclean things of her fornication, her 'customs of idolatry' (Moffatt), and the tyranny with which she pursued her blasphemous claims.

5. **upon her forehead a name written.** It was the practice of Roman prostitutes to wear upon their forehead a band with their name upon it. **Mystery.** This is not to be regarded as part of the name. 'A name which is a mystery,' *i.e.* has a symbolical meaning. The inscribed name is **Babylon the Great . . . earth. Mother,** *i.e.* 'chief of the harlots, and the source of the rest being what they were' (Simcox).

6. **drunken with the blood of the saints,** glutted with blood (see xviii. 24). In the temper of the time it would give comfort to know that Rome was filling up the measure of her iniquities. **wondered with a great wonder.** Why? At seeing all this glory, and realising that already it was under the sentence of God.

The picture of the woman is evidently a composite one, the details of which are drawn from two different originals. There is first the harlot sitting by the many waters, and in her hand a golden cup full of the unclean things of her fornication, and on her forehead the harlot's badge. The idea that is to the front in this picture is the power of seduction to Cæsar-worship that Rome exerted over her subject kings and peoples. The second picture is of the woman sitting upon a scarlet beast, arrayed in the garments of empire, adorned with the wealth of the world, drunk with the blood of the saints and martyrs. And here the predominant idea is Rome's ruthless cruelty in persecution. Even the two different ways in which the one sin, Cæsar-worship, is expressed—fornication and blasphemy—point to two different sources.

7–18. The interpretation of the woman and the beast on which she rides. The distinction between the woman (the city Rome) and the beast (the imperial power concentrated in the emperor) is to be kept in mind throughout.

7. **Wherefore didst thou wonder?** The effect of the question is

to prepare the mind of the seer and his readers for the interpretation of the mystery (cf. vii. 13). **I will tell thee the mystery.** I will explain what the symbol stands for.

The rest of the chapter up to ver. 17, with the exception of ver. 15 (on which see note), is taken up with the explanation of the beast and his heads and horns. Ver. 18 gives in a single sentence the significance of the woman, and thus forms an introduction to chap. xviii. which contains a detailed description of the fall of Babylon.

8. The interpretation of the beast. The beast is the Empire in its antichristian aspect. **was.** This looks back to some past manifestation of antichristian activity on the part of the Empire. The cruelties of Nero must have haunted the imagination of the Christians, especially in view of the expectation of his return as antichrist. **is not** points to the fact that when the seer was actually writing, there was a cessation of severe persecution. The essential feature of the Empire that marked it out as the beast was for the present in abeyance. **is about to come up out of the abyss** points to an outbreak of persecution as imminent. It is more probable, however, that the details of the description of the beast belong to the original oracle, and were taken over by John, though they had no special fitness for the circumstances in which he was writing. The tenor of the whole Book would lead us to think that persecution was in full swing. **and he goeth** (R.V. marg.) **into perdition.** Its end is the perdition of the lake of fire (xix. 20). The present tense suggests the inevitable march of evil across the stage of time to its own place. **shall wonder.** They were not to be astonished that all the world, with the exception of those who were enlightened from Heaven, should wonder at the beast, nor were they to allow themselves to be drawn under its glamour. Forewarned is forearmed. **when they see the beast that he was,** etc. It is this feature of his disappearance and reappearance that is the object of their wonder. It is this that constitutes the illusion of his divinity.

9. 'Here is opportunity for the discerning mind,' or 'the mind which hath wisdom will recognise the meaning of the image,' or 'here is the meaning that hath wisdom' (R.V. marg.). This *nota bene* points forward and calls attention to the interpretation that is coming. **The seven heads.** The writer has alternative interpretations of this image—(1) seven hills, and (2) seven kings. This suggests that the seven heads are a traditional feature of the image; for had John invented it, he would have given it a form in accordance with the idea that he had in his mind. But having received it, he finds that he can interpret it in two ways. **the seven heads are seven mountains**, the hills on which the city was built. But the writer is evidently not satisfied with this interpretation. A feature of the beast, by which is meant the Empire, cannot stand for what belongs to the city alone. Perhaps the writer is mentioning a common interpretation of the apocalyptic image only to reject it.

10. That by the beast the Roman Empire is meant, may be taken as an established fact. Also, it is almost certain that the heads are individual emperors. It would seem easy, then, to determine the one that is. But two considerations introduce uncertainty. 1. Is Julius Cæsar or Augustus to be regarded as the first of the line? 2. Are Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, or any one of them, who reigned for a very short time, and who were perhaps never recognised in Asia, to be included? The only way open seems to be to select such an interpretation as accords best with the known facts of history. Now, by beginning the series with Augustus and omitting the three mentioned, the sixth is Vespasian. The one who is not yet come, and who is to continue for a short time, would be Titus, whose reign was indeed short. But ver. 11 mentions an eighth, who would be Domitian. Evidently we have an extract from a writing of the reign of Vespasian, which was subsequently added to. (For the bearing upon the date, see Introduction, Sect. IV.) **he must continue**, *i.e.* in the purpose of God.

11. **the beast that was, and is not.** Part of the difficulty in inter-

preting this chapter is due to the fact that 'beast' is evidently used in a wider and a narrower sense. Hitherto it has meant the Empire of which the heads are the emperors. But here it is synonymous with an eighth head, *i.e.* the eighth emperor is identified with the Empire. He is to gather up in himself all the brutal attributes of the Empire. He is an eighth and at the same time is of the seven. He is one of the seven come to life again, and taking his place as eighth in the series. This finds its simplest explanation in the expectation that Nero was to appear again. Shortly after his death in 68 A.D. a rumour sprang up that he was not dead, but that he had fled to the Parthians. Thence he was expected to return with an army and destroy Rome. So stubborn was the belief that at least three pretenders arose claiming to be Nero. Gradually the belief gave way before the lapse of time; but the expectation grew that he would return from the dead as a new antichrist. The latter form of the myth is found in Rev. xvii. 8. (For the bearing of this on the date, see Introduction, Sect. IV.)

The difficulty that interpreters have had with vers. 10, 11 need hardly be wondered at when we consider that it began with the writer himself. He is trying to harmonise the facts of history with his traditional imagery. He had to find a place under the seven heads for eight emperors; and he succeeds only by bringing one of them back to life as the eighth in the series.

12. **the ten horns . . . are ten kings, which have received.** The relative is descriptive, 'such as have'; and the clause is meant to differentiate these kings from the former. A likely meaning is that they are the rulers of the provinces of the Empire, or the Eastern kings that were to lend assistance to Nero in his attack upon Rome. The number ten is probably a detail of the traditional image. We are here in the weltering chaos of current political hopes and fears, the vague apprehensions of disaster coming from the East, and the dark cloud of the returning Nero overhanging all.

13. **These have one mind.** What that mind is, is brought out in ver. 16. For the accomplishment of that purpose they lend their power to the beast.

14. The temptation to regard this verse as an interpolation is strong. It interrupts the natural movement of thought in the passage. The writer is setting forth, not the opposition of this confederacy to Christ, but their place in God's hand as the ministers of His judgments upon guilty Rome. The one mind that animates them is hatred of Rome. This is still more apparent if ver. 15 be omitted. **for He is Lord of lords.** This name of Christ comes in with greater effect in xix. 16. **called and chosen and faithful.** These three adjectives cover the long process of God's dealings with His people. They are called in His eternal purpose. They are chosen through the historic process of redemption in which they give a willing answer to the call. They are proved faithful through such tribulations as the Christians of Asia were having to face.

15. This verse is evidently originally a marginal explanation introduced into the text and in the wrong place.

The waters which thou sawest. There is no statement in the Book that the seer saw the waters. This detail belongs to the original oracle. **peoples**, etc. This phrase denotes the wide dominion of Rome.

16. The horns become confederate with the beast to carry out their single purpose. The beast is to be taken here in the narrower sense (see ver. 11). This verse startles us. We should think that loyalty to the Empire would gather round the imperial city. On the contrary, there was an intense hatred towards Rome on the part of the emperors and their subject allies. **make her desolate and naked**, etc., 'the doom of a Semitic harlot' (Moffatt).

17. The beast and his allies are unconsciously carrying out the purpose of God. Even the wicked find it impossible not to fulfil His will.

18. **the great city.** The seer paints in the most faithful colours

the glory and pomp and power of Rome. But he is not blind to the forces that are working her doom.

Chap. xviii. The destruction of Babylon. It is not the destruction of Rome as a material city, but as a spiritual symbol, that is set forth in this chapter. The writer makes the assertion that the organisation that sets itself against God will assuredly go down. 'The wages of sin is death.' Of course only one city could be chosen as illustration.

1. *having great power*, R.V. **authority**, corresponding with the work that he had to do.

2. **with a mighty voice**, for all the world to hear. **Fallen, fallen is Babylon** see on xiv. 8. *the habitation, the hold*, R.V. **a habitation, a hold.** It suggests great desolation that the place that had been the habitation of man and the scene of his activity should become the haunt of wild beasts. This impression is brought out in a celebrated picture of Palmyra in which a lioness and cubs are prowling about among its splendid ruins. By **devils** are perhaps meant the gods of paganism now revealed in their true light.

3. *For all nations have drunk*, R.V. **For by the wine . . . all the nations are fallen.** The difference in the originals consists in a single letter. **kings, merchants**, suggests the twofold relation—imperial and commercial—which Rome sustained to the world. The kings as representing Rome's political dominion have already appeared upon the stage (xvii. 2); but merchants appear here for the first time. It is natural and altogether in accordance with fact that her political relations should bulk more largely in the writer's eyes; but that he has an equally clear view of her commercial position is seen in the precision with which he sets forth its character. Greatly as he is influenced by Ezek. xxvi.–xxviii., he has changed the point of view to suit the position of Rome. For Rome was not a commercial city in the same sense as Tyre. She was an aristocrat among cities. Other cities grew rich through ministering to her necessities and

luxuries. It was hers to rule and to enjoy. Ezekiel speaks of Tyre, the seller; John, of Rome, the buyer. **the power of her wantonness** or voluptuousness (cf. money-power) enriched merchant cities like Ephesus.

4. This voice, summoning God's people to escape from Rome, heightens the impression of the certainty and the imminence of the judgment.

5. **her sins have reached**, clave together till they formed a heap reaching unto heaven.

7. Her pride and luxury were her undoing. The measure of her sin would be the measure of her punishment.

8. **in one day**. The irony of the situation was that while Rome fancied herself secure, any day might bring her fall. *judgeth*, R.V. **judged**. The judgment is conceived as an already accomplished fact.

The lamentation of the kings (9, 10).

9. The order of the original is very expressive. 'And there shall weep and wail over her the kings of the earth, they who committed fornication and lived wantonly with her.' The present anguish is shown over against a background of past splendour and luxury.

10. **standing afar off**. Sin produces isolation. A modern writer has a striking passage describing how men, one after another, came and stood on the opposite side of the street, and looked up at the window of the room in which their partner in sin lay dying of small-pox. **for the fear of her torment**, *i.e.* of sharing it. But the irony of the situation is that they are involved in her fate. She is like a great ship sinking beneath the waves that draws down with her all that are within the reach of her suction.

The lamentation of the merchants (11–17).

The traders of the world have lost their most profitable market. Rome drew the merchants around her as an heir, newly entered upon his inheritance, draws around him all manner of people who desire to live upon his follies. In this

chapter we have unexcelled testimony regarding the luxury and extravagance to which many contemporary writers bear witness. It is evidently written by one who had intimate knowledge of the articles of merchandise that passed along the great Eastern highway, to be shipped at Ephesus for Rome.

11. **no man buyeth their merchandise**, lit. cargo, wares. They had practically but one customer. The merchants are represented as arriving near Rome with ships full of wares, and gazing on the doomed city in dismay that their goods are now left upon their hands.

The list of wares falls into the following divisions :

1. *Articles of private and public adornment*—gold, silver, precious stones, pearls. The pearls probably came from the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. 2. *Textile fabrics for clothing*—fine linen, purple, silk, and scarlet. Linen came from Egypt. Silk, or Seric fabric, so called from Seres, an Indian people from whom the ancients first got it. 3. *Furniture of costly material*—thyine wood, ivory, precious wood, brass, iron, marble. Thyine wood, 'a fragrant, hard, dark brown, expensive material for furniture, exported from N. Africa' (Moffatt). Ivory was used extensively in the decoration of beds, couches, tables. 4. *Spices*—cinnamon, amomum, incense, myrrh, frankincense. The Romans used perfumes and spices to anoint their bodies and to mix with their wine. Amomum was an Eastern perfume much used at Rome. Frankincense was a fragrant gum-resin from S. Arabia. 5. *Food-stuffs*—wine, oil, fine-flour, wheat, cattle, sheep. Fine-flour was imported for the use of the wealthy. 6. *Horses, chariots, slaves.* Bodies and lives (souls) of men, *i.e.* slaves, which were brought to Rome from many quarters. There is no such meaning here as in the phrase 'selling one's soul.' Amid increasing luxury, and with the advance of industrialism, society is apt to pass from a stage in which even slaves are looked upon as 'souls' (Gen. xii. 5) to one in which free men are spoken of as 'hands.' The slaves may have been grooms and coachmen, who were as much chattels of their masters as the chariots and horses.

In the eyes of the writer Rome is not condemned for luxury. He looks with regret upon the great civilisation which had been built up by the toil of many generations, and which was now being sacrificed through the unfaithfulness of one.

14. **the fruits which thy soul lusted after.** The wealth still remained ; it was the user that had vanished like the baseless fabric of a dream.

15. The merchants, too, stand at a safe distance and utter their lamentation. The selfishness of their sorrow is suggested in the phrase **who were made rich by her.**

16. Both the kings and the merchants speak of Rome as she appeals to them. To the kings she is the great city, the strong city, the seat of dominion, furnishing protection to her subjects and allies. To the merchants she is the consumer of merchandise, gloriously arrayed. **decked**, literally, gilded, **with gold.**

17. The slow decay of great commercial towns is familiar enough. It is the suddenness of the catastrophe in this case that makes it so impressive. *is come to nought*, R.V. **is made desolate.**

17–19. The wail of the whole sea-going community.

A third class take up the dirge—**shipmasters**, who were perhaps also owners, **every one that saileth anywhither**, on business or on pleasure ; **mariners**; *as many as trade by sea*, R.V. **gain their living by sea**, literally, 'work the sea.'

19. **they cast dust on their heads**, a sign of mourning in the East. **her costliness**, 'her unrivalled spending-power' (Swete).

Over against the dirge raised by all those whose power, wealth, and livelihood perished in the overthrow of Rome, there rises a pæan of joy and triumph from the saints, apostles, and prophets, whose longings find fulfilment in the destruction of the persecutor. *hath avenged you*, R.V. **hath judged your judgment**, *i.e.* hath judged her, and avenged upon her your wrong.

21–24. A third vision, setting forth the destruction of Rome under another image—not as a city given to the flames, but as a city plunged into sudden and complete destruction.

21. **a strong angel**, as having a heavy bit of work to do. **a stone as it were a great millstone.** In a dramatic way does the angel reveal to the seer the nature of the judgment. 'Thus,' he says, and, suiting the action to the word, he hurls the stone into the sea, so that we can almost hear the whiz and splash of it.

22. This vision relates to the life, not to the external relations, political and commercial, of the city. All that makes up life, all the elements that cement society together, all the activities of life are brought to an end. The elements of life enumerated are —*joy*, as expressed by song and music; *the arts and crafts*; *domestic labour*, typified by the sound of the handmill; *home life*, suggested by the light of the lamp; *continuance of life*, symbolised by marriage. **with thy sorcery were all the nations deceived.** Rome had thrown a glamour over the eyes of all nations.

24. Rome had become the centre of persecution, and on her guilty head lay the blood of the martyrs.

The Bride of Christ.

Chap. xix. opens with a picture of the blessedness and serenity and purity of the bride of Christ in contrast with that of the heated splendour of the harlot.

1. **as it were a great voice of a great multitude.** The Christian Church to which this Book was written was small, and its members were being continually sifted out by persecution. But this vision intimates to them that those who would be victorious with Christ at last would be no little flock, but a vast multitude. **Hallelujah**, 'Praise ye the Lord,' a short doxology occurring at the beginning and the end of a number of the later psalms. **Salvation, and glory, and power.** The original has the article in every case, thus giving the sense of pre-eminence.

2. The two aspects of Rome's sin as combined in the composite picture of chap. xvii.—the harlot whose seductive influence went forth to all the world, and the woman drunk with the blood

of the saints—appear in her judgment. She had received the punishment both of a harlot and of a persecutor. **which did corrupt.** The force of the relative is 'for that she.'

3. **And a second time they say.** The Hallelujahs are antiphonal. 'One cried unto another.' **And her smoke goeth up for ever and ever,** is the contribution of the second band of singers to the doxology.

4, 5. Heaven resounds with hallelujahs rising from every created and redeemed being.

6. In answer to the summons of ver. 5 heaven breaks forth in praises as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders. The ground of the praise is that the power has fallen from the hand of the Cæsars. **The Lord our God, the Almighty,** hath taken the dominion. This is the positive aspect of the fall of Rome. On earth God has come to His own.

7. Mingling with 'the shout of them that triumph' is 'the song of them that feast.' The outcome of all the struggle of History is the marriage of the Lamb, the intimate and indissoluble union of Christ with the Church that He has redeemed and that has proved faithful to Him.

8. In contrast with the imperial splendour, the purple and scarlet of the harlot, the garments of the bride of Christ are of fine linen, bright and pure. **for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.** This has all the appearance of having been originally a marginal explanation. It is altogether out of harmony with the symbolism of the doxology.

9. This verse is a *nota bene* calling the attention of the persecuted Christians to the blessedness of the end of their faithful travail. This blessing was intended to awaken to clear consciousness and impelling power an answering thrill in the hearts of the readers. The emphatic assertion of the angel, **These are the true words of God,** was meant to assure them of the truth of the marvellous hope that they might receive an invitation to the marriage-supper of the Lamb, nay, might even be of the bride, for the bride was also the guests.

10. Overcome by emotion, the seer felt an almost irresistible impulse to worship the angel. If we picture the scene to our mind's eye, we see the angel, as soon as he realises the direction of John's intention, hastily putting forth his hand to prevent the seer from falling on his knees, with the words 'No, No!' The incident has a hortative aim. The explanation that is given of it shows that it is meant to lift up the faithful Christians to the level of the angels, whose glory it is that they are fellow-servants with the faithful that keep the testimony of Jesus. **for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.** This is one of the most difficult verses of the whole Book. We can regard it from two points of view—1. as part of the angel's words, 2. as a later addition. If it is to be regarded as spoken by the angel, it is intended to deepen the impression conveyed in his prohibition of worship. To hold the witness of Jesus is the very essence of ministering revelation. What more can an angel do than tell out what has been given him by God to tell? And what less do they do, who keep the testimony of Jesus? But the statement has all the appearance of being an explanation added by a later hand. 'Worship God' is a striking conclusion to the incident. Some have held that the author introduced this incident in order to discourage and check a tendency to angel-worship which, as we learn incidentally from St. Paul (Col. ii. 18), had long before this made its appearance in the churches of Asia Minor. But it is unlikely that the writer would turn aside from his aim to deal with an evil that was in evidence only here and there. The incident finds sufficient explanation within the writer's argument. If an angel from heaven was not so lifted up above the followers of Jesus as to be entitled to receive worship, a dying man, even though he were a Cæsar, could put forth no such claim.

The Final Destruction of Cæsar-Worship.

11–16. The triumph of Christ over the beast and his allies.

11. **a white horse.** This rider upon the white horse is not the

rider of vi. 2. **Faithful and True.** This name of Christ expresses the ideal that the writer is presenting to his readers. What Christ is they should strive to be. **in righteousness.** The 'two-fold functions of a Semitic king' (Moffatt) were to judge and make war (1 Sam. viii. 20).

12. **His eyes** (i. 14) are keen and piercing, so that no enemy will remain undiscovered. **many diadems** denote wide, universal sovereignty. Distinction has to be made between the diadem, the symbol of authority, and the crown, the symbol of victory. The diadem was a fillet or band worn round the forehead. The crown or garland was made of leaves of bay, ivy, or parsley. Christ's sovereignty was greater than that of Domitian. **name written, which no man knoweth but He Himself.** This unknown name denotes the infinite fulness of His nature, which transcends the power of mortals to know. 'God only knows the love of God.'

13. *a vesture dipt in blood*, R.V. **garment sprinkled with blood** (cf. Isa. lxiii. 1). Is it His own blood or that of His enemies? The severe character of the passage makes the latter more likely. **The Word of God.** There is a close connection between the utterance of the Truth and the conquest of the world. The weapons by which Christ wins His victories are not the weapons of Rome.

14. **the armies which are in heaven.** Are they saints or angels? The trend of the Book would suggest that they are saints. **followed Him upon white horses.** To follow Him in suffering means to follow Him in victory.

16. Inscriptions on the thigh or the sword-belt, specifying the dignity of the wearer, are sometimes found on old monuments.

17–21. The final destruction of Cæsar-worship.

17. The battle is not seen; but the greatness of the carnage is suggested by the invitation uttered to all the birds of heaven, to come to the great feast that has been provided for them by God.

20. After the battle comes the capture of the prisoners.

the beast was taken, *i.e.* the beast out of the sea, the imperial power in its antichristian aspect. **the false prophet**, whose magic was employed by the beast (xiii. 13, xvi. 13) to deceive and seduce the nations. **the lake of fire**, the place of utter destruction. When an evil institution has run its course and has accomplished all that it can do, it is destroyed.

The Millennium.

Chap. xx. The one great lie is dead. Cæsar-worship is overcome and destroyed. But the resources of Satan to deceive are not yet exhausted.

1. **the key of the abyss and a great chain.** Satan is imprisoned in the abyss and restrained from 'going to and fro upon the earth' for a time. This evidently points to a period when evil will be in abeyance, and when it shall be easier for men to walk in the way of the Lord. That there are such times, when the world is more inclined to good and less under the temptation to evil, cannot be denied. And such occasions fall when the glow of the victory over some manifestation of evil is still lying upon the world. **in his hand**, *i.e.* hanging from it. The chain is a manacle, restraining action.

2. **the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan.** In some texts this is not in the accusative in apposition to dragon, but in the nominative. This suggests that it may have been originally a marginal explanation taken from xii. 9. **bound him for a thousand years**, *i.e.* for a considerable but not indefinite time. **sealed it over him**, to make assurance doubly sure. Dr. Moffatt aptly brings the *Arabian Nights* to the illustration of the passage. He says that the dragon is locked up 'like an Arabian jinnee.' **he must be loosed**, *i.e.* in the counsel of God.

4–6. Perhaps no passage in the Bible has given rise to so much polemic as this. Yet it is a passage that Christian common sense is coming to recognise as of little practical importance. The conception of the millennium is first found in the Book of the

Secrets of Enoch (written probably 1–50 A.D.). As God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, so its history was to continue for 6000 years, followed by a period of 1000 years of rest. For with the Lord 1000 years are as one day. In this Book the millennial reign must be interpreted as the apocalyptic expression of a historical condition. It is the positive side of the hindrance of evil by the binding of Satan. The passage tells of a complete change in the position of the followers of Christ through the passing away of Cæsar-worship. Instead of being judged, they judge; instead of being persecuted, they reign. 'The picture presented to the mind is that of a state of society in which Christian opinion is dominant, and positions of influence and authority are held by believers, and not, as in the age of John, by pagans and persecutors.'[1] It is the realisation on earth of the heavenly forecast of v. 10.

4. **I saw thrones, and they sat upon them**, *i.e.* persons who had received authority, and to whom the right of passing judgment had been granted. Who are these that are raised to the dominion? They are described as **the souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God**, and had had nothing to do with the beast. The vision is, then, a direct promise to those who will stand firm in the coming conflict, that they shall be sharers in Christ's victory. **beheaded.** This was a favourite Roman method of execution. The reference, then, is to such as had died in the kind of conflict that the Christians of Asia were face to face with. **and they lived, and reigned with Christ a thousand years.** The thought that Christ uses regarding Himself (I was dead and lived, ii. 8) is applied to His followers. They had been slain; yet they lived and reigned.

5*a*. **The rest of the dead.** This does not mean merely the wicked dead, but includes the righteous dead who had passed away in peace; as well as those who had maintained the con-

[1] Swete.

flict for God with other world-powers. John keeps firmly before his view the martyrs of his own time, those who were being put to death for their defiance of the imperial claims. It was their hour.

But the promise of millennial blessedness has a secondary application to all who suffer for righteousness' sake in any phase of the conflict between Christ and Satan.

5*b*, 6. **This is the first resurrection.** A belief in two resurrections seems to have been current in the first century. Nor need we have any hesitation in believing that the writer shared in the belief. It was part of the heritage to which he fell heir. But into the old bottles of apocalyptic imagery he poured the new wine of Christian thought and faith. On the supposition, then, that these words are from John's hand, we must not make the theological belief of his time the clue to the interpretation of the millennial vision. It is by his theory of history that the meaning that he gives to current language is to be determined. Underneath his picture of the millennial blessedness he writes: 'This is the meaning that must be applied to the first resurrection—this and no other.'

But there are reasons of some weight for holding that vers. 5*a*, 6 are not part of the original writing. The passage disturbs the progress of the vision. It introduces new ideas abruptly. It repeats in an awkward way what has already been said. It adds nothing to the vision, but is feebly explanatory of it. It brings down the glowing poetry to prosaic dogma. We can more easily believe that an after theologian, whose mind was filled with the millenarian ideas that soon took hold of the Church, wrote the passage as a note on the margin of his copy than that one with the genius of the writer should destroy the force of the appeal that the vision was calculated to make upon the hearts of his readers by introducing a cold and formal exegesis of it.

The second death is a conception that is found in the original writing. To the church in Smyrna the promise is made that if it

was faithful unto death, it would not be hurt of the second death, which in xxi. 8 is interpreted to mean the lake of fire and brimstone. The explanatory clause in xx. 14 has the appearance of being an after addition drawn from xxi. 8.

7–10. The loosing of Satan for new efforts against God.

On the expiry of the thousand years Satan is loosed. This must be interpreted in line with the former manifestation of Satan. The effects of the victory that has already been gained wear off in time. He shall ally himself again with some world-force. What that world-force shall be John leaves dim and shadowy. Beyond the limits of the Roman Empire and his own day he does not dogmatise. The new forces of evil that will in their time appear above the horizon he symbolises by the gathering together of innumerable armies out of the regions beyond the fringe of the Roman power, vague barbarian forces from the confines of the world that shall muster and pass across the earth in a new conflict with Christ. **Gog and Magog.** These names appear in Ezek. xxxviii. and xxxix., the former as a prince, and the latter as the land over which he ruled. Gog has been identified with the Lydian king Gyges. But the name passed in Jewish apocalypse into a general title for the enemies of Israel that were to be finally overcome in the Messianic time. **to gather them together to the war.** So the frogs do with the kings (xvi. 14), showing that a movement of the same kind is meant. **the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.** This suggests that the conflicts of the future will be even more severe than that of the present.

9. **over the breadth of the earth.** That final struggle is to be world-wide. **the camp of the saints** represents the Church of Christ as a military force, while **the beloved city** represents it as a society that is under the love and care of God. **fire came down out of heaven and devoured them.** Again, when the writer is dealing with what is outside the region of observation, he falls back upon apocalyptic imagery.

10. The end of Satan, after all his wiles have been met and

foiled, and all his resources exhausted, is to be cast into the lake of fire, where the beast and the false prophet, his worn-out instruments, already are.

The General Judgment.

After the millennium, after all the millennia of history, the results of human life will be summed up, and judgment will be passed upon them.

11. **I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat upon it.** In the same reverent way has already been expressed the supreme sovereignty of the universe (iv. 2). **a great white throne,** with evident reference to ver. 4. In the millennial era judgment was given to the martyrs; but the Final Judgment upon all the ages belongs to God alone. It is a *great* throne as being God's; it is a *white* throne as indicating the clear light in which all the lives of men will be revealed and judged. It is not the throne of universal sovereignty of chap. iv. but the tribunal of Universal Judgment. **from whose face,** etc. The holiness of God is expressed by saying that the heaven and the earth are not able to stand before Him.

12. **the dead.** The Judgment is to be universal. Books were opened, containing the record of the lives of men. **another book, which is the book of life** (see on xiii. 8). According to their works (cf. Matt. xxv.).

13. **the sea gave up.** This is a natural touch in writing of Mediterranean lands where shipwrecks must have been of continual occurrence.

14. Death and Hades are looked upon as belonging to one great system of evil that is finally overcome by God. **This is the second death,** the lake of fire, undoubtedly a prosaic explanation of the same kind as in ver. 5.

15. **And if any was not found,** etc. How great the awe that such a vision would awake in the readers. Over against the few short years of evil that they had to endure here is the unending torment of the lake of fire.

Life made Perfect.

Chap. xxi. The issue of the struggle of History in the new heaven and the new earth—Life made perfect.

1. **A new heaven and a new earth** is a prophetic and apocalyptic conception. *there was no more sea*, R.V. **the sea is no more.** The sea is 'the element out of which the beast arose.' Or there may be in the mention of the sea the feeling of revolt in the writer's mind against what separated him from the flock that needed his shepherding, at least the germ of Matthew Arnold's

'The unplumbed, salt, estranging sea.'

2. *John* is to be omitted. **the holy city.** The ideal life is still represented as a city, but in contrast with the harlot city it is the holy city. **as a bride.** The suggestion of xix. 7 f. is now to be developed. But here it has a wider meaning. It is not the Church victorious over Cæsar-worship merely, but the Church as it shall have emerged victorious from all the struggles of History.

3 f. **a great voice out of the throne.** On the authority of God it is announced that the highest conceptions of the prophetic imagination shall be fulfilled. As the Shekinah was with the Israelites during their desert-journey, so will God's presence be with His people. He shall wipe all tears from their eyes. Death shall have been cast into the lake of fire (xx. 14). Mourning, crying and pain shall be no more.

5. The wonder of it all is so great as almost to pass belief. Therefore the seer confirms the truth of it in various ways. The removal of all past evil is asserted by God Himself. The solemn phrase, **He that sitteth on the throne,** has almost the significance of an oath. Further, the angel directs him to write. And again, the words that he is told to write—**these words are faithful and true**—are calculated to win the faith of his readers to what would be almost incredible.

6. *It is done*, R.V. **they are come to pass.** The end of History

has come. The Creation in all its purposes has been consummated. **I am the Alpha and the Omega** (see on i. 8). That God is the Alpha and the Omega is the guarantee that all things promised shall be accomplished.

7. The difference between the promise in this verse and that in ver. 6 is perhaps not without significance. God will quench the thirst of all thirsty souls; but only those who overcome shall inherit the fulness of bliss. **He that overcometh.** The singular emphasises individual responsibility. *all things*, R V. **these things.**

8. Over against the reward of the faithful is placed the fate of those who are unfaithful—they have no part in the holy city. The **fearful** or the cowards are first condemned in an exhortation to courage; then the **unfaithful** or perhaps the **unbelieving**, those who have apostatised, and so have become the **abominable**, polluted with Cæsar-worship. Then follow **murderers**, those who have been persecutors; **fornicators**, perhaps with a wider meaning than idolaters; **sorcerers**, those who have deceived like the false prophet; **idolaters, all liars**, all who through fear have yielded will have their portion with those who were the allies and ministers of the beast. Thus the inducement to faithfulness is not only in the reward of the victors, but in the fate of those who yield to temptation in order to purchase life and ease on earth.

xxi. 9–xxii. 5. The seer encourages his readers with a nearer, more detailed, and more ravishing view of the Holy City.

9. The same angel that invited him to witness the doom of the harlot city invites him to behold the felicity of the Holy City. Thus the one picture is set in intentional contrast to the other. 'Come hither, I will show thee the judgment of the great harlot.' 'Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb.' To confirm him in righteousness, Dante is led not only through the prison-house of the damned, but also through the abodes of the blessed. The latter vision is always the greater power for righteousness.

10. **a mountain great and high** is a symbol of lofty and wide vision in contrast to the wilderness of xvii. 3.

11. **having the glory of God**, the Shekinah of the Divine presence. The first impression on the seer is that of dazzling light, radiating out from a luminary which was like **a stone most precious, as it were a jasper stone, clear as crystal.** See on iv. 3.

12 f. The security of the city was provided for by **a wall great and high.** Ready entrance into it was secured by **twelve gates,** three of which looked towards each point of the compass. Twelve angels stood as guardians of the gates; but their function was to make admission easy, not, as was the case with the angels that guarded the gates of Eden, to bar the way. **names of the twelve tribes.** As in chap. vii. the idea is universality.

14. The foundations of the city wall symbolise strength and permanence. In the names of the twelve apostles there may be a symbol of the historical origin of the Church in the primitive circle of the disciples (cf. Eph. ii. 20).

15. The angel had a golden reed to measure the city. Measurement is in the Bible an essential feature of description. The measurement was for the seer's information.

16. The form of the city was a perfect cube. All attempts to picture such a city to the eye fail. But the thought that the writer intended to set forth regarding it, as a life of perfect symmetry and harmony, could not be more graphically represented. The cube suggested perfection to the ancient mind. 12,000 furlongs or stadia amounted to 1378 English miles. The ancients had no instrument like the chain for measuring long distances.

17. The cubit was the average length of the forearm from the elbow to the finger-tip. **according to the measure of a man,** 'Man's measure which is angel's measure' (Benson).

18. The symbols used to describe the city are those that suggested to the imagination of the time splendour and richness. These symbols stand for spiritual realities. **the building of the wall** is the material of which it is built. Milton represents the

fallen angels as digging ribs of gold out of a hill in Hell, and rearing a structure which might rival the outward magnificence of Heaven.

19. It would seem that each foundation consisted of a single stone. As nearly as possible the stones of the foundation have been identified as follows :—jasper, dark green jasper (but see on iv. 3); sapphire, lapis lazuli; chalcedony, a green stone so named from Chalcedon; emerald, emerald; sardonyx, red and white onyx; sardius, the red carnelian or sard; chrysolite, our topaz; beryl, beryl; topaz, our chrysolite; chrysoprase, green chalcedony; jacinth, probably our sapphire; amethyst, amethyst.

21. Each gate was a pearl. The street of the city was pure gold. Even the things of most servile use were of the greatest price and beauty.

22. **I saw no temple therein,** for where God is, the symbol of God's presence is not needed.

23. The symbol has passed away because the reality has come.

24. Omit *of them that are saved.* The tribute of kings as enhancing the glory of a city was an ancient idea. The perfect life shall embrace all the achievements of those who reigned supreme in every department of human activity.

26. All in human history that is worth preserving shall find a place in the life made perfect.

27. Nothing that is of sin shall have a place in the Holy City (cf. Isa. lii. 1). This is a warning against apostasy.

Chap. xxii. 1. **And he showed me** marks the transition to a new idea, the life of the inhabitants of the City. **a river of water of life** means 'water that gives life.'

2. The R.V. joins **in the midst of the street thereof** with ver. 1, indicating that the river flowed through the city. Life pervades the City of God. The river carries life. The trees yield life. The fruit of the tree of life is always in season. **the leaves of the tree.** Touches like this show how natural it was for the writer

to glide from the thought of a Heaven that was to be realised in the future to that of a Heaven that is being realised now.

3 ff. *no more curse*, R.V. **no curse any more.** Nothing shall be devoted to destruction. **the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be therein.** The secret of blessedness is that the sovereignty of Love is acknowledged. **His servants shall do Him service,** a perfect and untrammelled priestly service. **they shall see His face.** The desire of every heart, the beatific vision, shall be theirs. **His name shall be on their foreheads** means that they shall have grown into perfect likeness to Him.

Reign for ever and ever, in contrast to the reign of a thousand years.

EPILOGUE, 6–20.

The remaining verses form an epilogue in which two main ideas are enforced—the trustworthiness of the prophecy and the imminence of its fulfilment. The passage as a whole gives the impression of consisting of a number of fragments loosely joined together by such phrases as 'and he said.' These fragments exhibit, broadly speaking, two points of view. One is that of the seer who was commanded to put a trumpet to his lips and to summon to endurance. But there is also the standpoint of a later age, when the Book, having lost its original significance for readers, was interpreted as a revelation of the course of the world's history, especially of the end. The distinction between these two points of view will help roughly to distinguish what is original from liturgical and other additions (cf. on chap. i. 1–3).

6. **And he said unto me.** Who? Evidently the angel who had showed him the Holy City. **These words are faithful and true.** These words are the contents of the entire Book (cf. xxi. 5). It was a revelation whose truth the readers needed to be assured of, because of the wonder of it, and because of the suffering to which it called them. *the Lord God of the holy prophets*, R.V. **the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets.** This second part of the verse has the point of view of i. 1. There is the same

gradation, Christ, angel, prophet, servants. The God of the spirits of the prophets means the source of all prophetic inspiration.

7. The original letter probably ran : 'And he said unto me, 'These words are faithful and true,' and, 'Behold, I come quickly.' Such short, sharp sentences admirably conclude a book whose reception was a matter of life and death to the Church. Even Art will not allow the hortative power of the Book to be spoiled by a long-drawn-out epilogue. **Blessed is he that keepeth.** This is a warning against indulging in speculations beyond what has been given on Divine authority.

8. **I John am he that heard and saw these things** (cf. i. 9). This clause lays stress upon the first-hand nature of the testimony. The incident of the worship of the angel does not come in suitably here. Wherein it differs from xix. 10 is significant. **with them which keep the words of this book** represents a different standpoint from **thy brethren that hold the testimony of Jesus.** The latter phrase means those that follow Christ in His sufferings ; the former, those who hold orthodox beliefs.

10. **And he saith unto me.** The second thought in the Epilogue is the imminence of the fulfilment of the prophecy. **Seal not up the words.** To seal up words is to keep them secret. This prophecy is for the present crisis, not for a far-distant future, as was generally the case with apocalyptic utterances. See Dan. viii. 26.

11. The writer entertains no expectation of any great change in the world before the consummation to which he looks forward. There will be no time for change of character on a large scale. Men must remain what they are. At the same time there is warning in the words. The Christians must hold fast the vantage ground that they occupy. **He that is unrighteous,** *i.e.* the wrongdoer. **Filthy,** *i.e.* the moral reprobate. For the reading **still** the R.V. marg. renders 'yet more.' While there is no change from state to state, there may be progress or degeneracy from stage to stage. By faithfulness or unfaithfulness they will advance along the line that they have chosen.

12. The bearing of this promise from Christ's own lips upon the main purpose of the Book is obvious.

13. **I am the Alpha**, etc. Cf. on i. 8, where the words are used of God. Here Christ uses them of Himself. This shows the position that He held in the thought of the Early Church.

14. *Blessed are they that do His commandments*, R.V. **they that wash their robes.** The difference between the two readings in the original is very slight. **wash their robes.** There is an obvious reference to vii. 14, the recalling of which passage would have a hortative effect. From beginning to end the certainty of suffering is kept before their eyes. **the right** *to come* **to the tree of life,** or 'liberty to come to.' Only those who have come through the great tribulation will have liberty to come to the tree of life. Life is through death.

15. Gothic architecture revelled in the representation of the grotesque, but only on the outside of the sacred building. All within was beautiful and harmonious. So into the heavenly temple there shall not enter anything that defileth.

The original writing seems to end upon these words with the exception of the benediction. A plea may be put in for the retention of ver. 16 as meaning that Christ is putting to His seal that the words of His servant are true. But the first half of the verse is in line with the idea of i. 1 ; and the second half is a somewhat prosaic identification of Christ with some of the imagery throughout the Book.

It is much more difficult to contend that ver. 17 does not belong to the original letter. One would fain believe that it closed with this note of mercy and invitation which sums up the message of the N.T. Yet strict exegesis reveals the presence of later ideas. **The Spirit and the Bride say, Come.** To whom? To Jesus. It is the answer of him who is speaking by the Spirit, and of the Bride, the Church, to Christ's 'I come quickly.' **he that heareth** may mean he that hears the Book read in the congregation, in whose heart the utterance of the promise awakens the desire for its fulfilment. This desire for the coming of Christ was

strong in the Early Church. But it was not this desire that John from Patmos sought to awaken in the hearts of his readers. Christ *was* coming, they did not need to pray for that ; what they needed was endurance amid all that His coming meant, that they would not faint amid the birth-throes of the new age. **And he that is athirst, let him come**, is an invitation in the Spirit of Christ to all men to come and receive of His free gift of life. It may be a reminiscence of xxi. 6. Its position here may be explained on the supposition that the two parts of the verse were written on the margin of a MS. by two different hands and were brought together in the text by a copyist. It would be interesting to try to follow out the types of mind that gave rise to two notes so different from one another. Was the second note written by one in whom the desire for the salvation of all men protested against the millenarian view that was content to consign the pagan world to perdition if only the outward triumph of the Church would come?[1] It is needless to say that whatever view we may take of the origin of this invitation, its value is not in the least impaired. It is an utterance of the very highest aspiration of the Church.

18 f. Whatever hesitation may be felt in excluding from the original letter such consecrated words as vers. 16 and 17 contain, there need be no reluctance to consign 18 f. to a later age. They belong to a system of ideas much inferior to that of the original work. Their atmosphere is that of i. 1–3 (see notes on these verses). They belong to a time when the imagination was apt to run riot in conceiving world-schemes, and when it was necessary not merely to authenticate what was true, but to warn off from what was false.

20. This verse follows naturally upon 17*a*. Christ's word of promise comes like the echo of the Church's prayer. The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' He that testifieth these things says, **'Yea : I come quickly.'** And again the Church makes response, **Amen : come, Lord Jesus.**

Cf. Matthew Arnold's sonnet, 'The Good Shepherd with the Kid.'

21. It is probable that the original letter closed with a benediction. The benediction in the A.V. is *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.* The R.V. has, **The grace of the Lord Jesus be with the saints. Amen** is probably a liturgical addition.

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